

# The Creole Elite and the Rise of Angolan Proto-Nationalism: 1880-1910

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this essay is to define the peculiarities of Angolan urban society and trace its evolution during the second half of the nineteenth century, a lapse of time marked by relative freedom—due to the economic crisis affecting Portugal from the definitive abolition of slavery and to the social and artistic progressive reformer impulse promoted by the Generation of 1870. This made possible the establishment in Luanda of lively journalistic activity and the production of a literary *corpus*—principally written by traders, soldiers, public officers, and landowners, born in Africa and tied both to their European and African origins, which witnessed the growth of a feeling of dissatisfaction destined to culminate in a heterogeneous set of open claims for autonomy or even independence.

This article investigates a segment of Angolan history and literature with which non-Portuguese-speaking readers are generally not familiar, for its main purpose is to define the features and the literary production of what are conventionally called Creole elites, whose contribution to the early manifestations of dissatisfaction towards colonial rule was patent between 1880 and 1910, a period of renewed Portuguese commitment to its African colonies, but also of unrealised ambitions, economic crisis and socio-political upheaval in Angola and in Portugal itself.

At that time, Angolan society was characterized by the presence of a semi-

urbanized commercial and administrative elite of Portuguese-speaking Creole families—white, black, some of mixed race, some Catholic and others Protestant, some old-established and others cosmopolitan—who were based in the main coastal towns. As well as their wealth, derived from the functions performed in the colonial administrative, commercial, and custom apparatus, their European-influenced culture and habits clearly distinguished them from the broad population of black African peasants and farm workers. In order to expand its control over the region, Portugal desperately needed the support of this kind of non-colonizer urban elite, which was also used as an assimilating force, or better as a source of dissemination of a relevant model of social behaviour. Until the nineteenth century, great Creole merchants and inland chiefs dealt in captive slaves, bound for export to Brazil via São Tomé e Príncipe and the Cape Verde islands. The tribal aristocracy and the Creole bourgeoisie thrived on the profits of overseas trade and used to live in style, consuming large quantities of imported alcoholic beverages and wearing fashionable European clothes.

In the early twentieth century, however, their social and economic position was eroded by an influx of petty merchants and bureaucrats from Portugal who wished to grasp the commercial and employment opportunities created by a new and modern colonial order, anxious to keep up with other European colonial powers engaged in the partition of the African continent. This study considers the “first intellectuals,” the early printed publications in the country and the “precursor Africans” who, feeling the need to raise their roots to higher dignity, wrote grammars and dictionaries but also poetry, fiction and, of course, incendiary articles denouncing exploitation, racism, and the different treatment afforded by the colonial authorities to Portuguese expatriates and natives. They were fully aware of the fact that their past function as a link between the few rulers sent from the metropolis and the African inland tribes was indispensable to the perpetration of the colonial system, and that the system guaranteed them a privileged condition as well as exposure to European culture. On the other hand, they were thwarted by the impossibility of achieving the highest social standing in their own homeland. Their first reaction was the invention of a new identity, introducing the term “children of the country,” or “sons of the country,” and the adjective “*Angolense*” in order to define themselves in clear opposition to both the Portuguese and the “uncivilized” black natives.

With the rise of both black nationalism and armed struggle still in the future—as well as the international recognition attributed to acclaimed con-

temporary writers such as Pepetela and Luandino Vieira and, in general, to the Angolan militant literature of the second part of the twentieth century—the period of Angolan history that is at the centre of this investigation still presents wide open spaces. Moreover, the literary production that flourished during those years is generally dismissed as minor colonial literature or, at best, celebrated by the apologists of the colonial empire as the outcome and evidence attesting to the existence of a multicultural, intellectual, Creole elite, originating in proverbial and overrated Portuguese plasticity. According to this reasoning, the idealized pervasive practice of interracial marriage was irrefutable proof indicating a total absence of racism among the Portuguese.

It is no surprise that the end of the colonial period coincided with a call to reaffricanize the new political elites governing Angola and with the banishment of any kind of syndrome evoking Lusitanity, let alone the recognition of the intellectual vibrancy and legitimacy of a distinct Creole perspective.

When speaking about contemporary literature, for instance, Angolan book reviewer Luís Kandjimbo does not consider as authentically “Angolan” the well-known novel by Pepetela, *Yaka*, wondering if it can indeed be defined as a colonial novel, since it emphasizes “a kind of alterity built upon a fictional discourse in which, as absolute protagonist, the [Creole] Semedo family symbolizes the *other* in a society where black characters are reduced to mere walk-on figures or objects of observation [...]. The preponderance of a vision subduing history and its real actors deprives the novel of any worthiness, bringing into question whether it could belong to the genre classified as historical novel” (61-62).

Pepetela was born and raised in the colonial society as a white Angolan, but this did not prevent him from joining the national struggle for freedom against the Portuguese (1961-74). *Yaka* is his novel portraying the Benguela Creole society from the end of the nineteenth century to the eve of independence. An exacerbated defence of Africanness would equally exclude from Angolan literature the commitment of some contemporary writers aiming to piece together this important but neglected phase of Angolan history, such as José Eduardo Agualusa and Arnaldo Santos. In any case, as noticed by Cosme in his 2001 essay *Crioulos e Brasileiros de Angola*, at the present time any memory other than the genuinely black African one can hardly be appreciated in Angola. These days, the concept of Creoleness, as a sort of caution or royalty granted by Portuguese colonization, is no more than a rhetorical figure destined to fade away with those who still aspire to any historical right of

compensation for the biological discrimination and cultural interdiction suffered in the past or for the political prescriptions that turned them into "Portuguese-others" (Cosme 57).

This attitude seems to be confirmed by the demolition in 1999 of the primary emblem of the Creole past dating back to the nineteenth century: the mansion that once belonged to the powerful mulatto mistress of Luanda Dona Ana Joaquina dos Santos Silva, *Nã Andêmbô*. She was a slave trader, rich from the fortunes of ships, *fazendas*, and buildings owned both in Brazil and Angola, and an authentic patroness of Creole society until her death in 1859.

The claims of autonomy and independence expressed at a time of profound changes affecting Portuguese society and colonial policies during the period examined were the expression of just a tiny fragment of Angolan urban society. They were involved in the slave trade and deeply integrated into the colonial system, to which they supplied the subordinate administrative body of the province and the middle and low ranks of the armies sent to fight in the countless *Guerras Pretas* [Black Wars] waged by Portugal to subdue unruly and rebellious tribes. Moreover, their demands were not direct evidence of an original sprouting of national consciousness as much as they were inspired by the echoes of the liberal ideals that could reach, covertly packed below deck, the harbours of Luanda and Benguela through the merchant ships proceeding from Brazil or Europe, ideals that were often assimilated in a quite disorderly and confused way.

It is also evident that the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of the country were completely excluded from the formulation of these claims, and that the same happened for the concept of the country itself. At that time, the notion of Angola was grounded on the limited—if compared with the actual size of the country, that is, the territory claimed by the Portuguese at the end of the nineteenth century—surface of the land effectively occupied and "civilized" by the colonial rulers: the towns of Luanda, Benguela, Moçâmedes and related districts, the river Kwanza region and a few more garrison houses, trading posts, *fazendas* and frontier-like small inland settlements.

This first wave of dissidence was most assuredly born and raised inside the colonial milieu itself and was promoted by a local and heterogeneous urban social stratum that embraced and opposed at the same time both their European and African background. Consequently, it seems that the fate of the so-called "civilized" Africans was to be eternally confined in a sort of limbo that precluded any possible access to either the metropolitan or the African world.

Nonetheless, we are facing the first sign of “modern” resistance to colonial rule in Angola and that cannot be ignored, neither for the historical and cultural worthiness of the texts produced, nor for the development of a cognitive inquiry into the discourse of nativism, proto-nationalism, and nationalism, without neglecting the influence wielded by these forerunners over the following generations. Already in 1891, for instance, the only and anonymous issue of the satirical journal *O Tomate* featured an article entitled “*Independence of Angola*.” Its main purpose was to capture the family connections and interrelationships that took place during the whole colonial period between the “sons of the country” of the coast and the rebel African chiefs based in the hinterland.

For the first time, the protagonists of the resistance against Portuguese penetration were cheered as heroes (Cruz e Silva 11-12). Almost one century later, MPLA founder Mário de Andrade, interviewed in 1982 by the French sociologist Christine Messiant on the birth of Angolan nationalism, said: “Those who later followed the path of nationalism—and I am talking about the first small group, the core—shared, generally speaking, an important source, that is the familial source. I mean that all of us were aware of the generation belonging to the final part of the last century and its cultural expression, be it political or simply literary. My father, for example, owned all the books, *Voz de Angola clamando no deserto* among them and all the old articles published in the *Luso-Brazilian Almanac*. We can say that we were nourished by the ideas of that generation” (Andrade 189).

These ideas are also a starting point for a more extensive reflection about the effective meaning, at least as far as Portuguese colonial and postcolonial studies are concerned, of paradigmatic categories such as cultural, linguistic, and racial hybridism or of the concept of Creoleness, for they are the expression of a transcultural, autochthonous society emerging in urban or semi-urban spaces and characterized by the fusion of distinct migratory streams.

These are spaces where Portuguese, Brazilians, other Europeans, Bantus, traders, missionaries, and slaves shared a common condition of eradication from the homeland, and lived in a “double trance made of disadaptation and readaptation, deculturation or exculturation, acculturation or enculturation: the synthesis of all has to be found in the field of transculturation, where human beings, economies, cultures and aspirations felt themselves estranged, provisional and changed, as migrant birds over the country” (Pacheco 203).



Furthermore, the relevance of the role played by a literature sprouting in such a milieu is evident today. In addition to its contribution to the enrichment of the discourse about the formulation of issues related to cultural and postcolonial studies, and to the deepening and understanding of basic concepts such as “nationalism” and “Creole,” the importance of its seminal function relative to the birth of Angolan literature and to the settlement of the dichotomy existing between colonial and national literature is beyond doubt. An abrupt definition of all poetry and fiction written in Angola before 1948 as simply colonialist, exotic and assimilationist overseas literature, retaining only aspects such as alienation, descriptiveness, or the Portuguese colonial point of view, seems to be a gross historical and cultural deformation since, even as far as Angola is concerned, the rise of national consciousness is a slow and deep maturation process.<sup>1</sup> Generally, this rise of consciousness contributes to a series of ethnic, social, religious, political, and ideological factors and is unlikely to start suddenly on the eve of independence. It starts through the observation of the differences existing between the land, the people, and the colonizer country. It goes on through the acquisition of awareness in respect to problems related to the colour of skin, through the rejection of injustice. It creates its own traditions and historical events and, from then on, it claims independence and state organization.

In contrast, since the present study aims to make its way through a cultural, ethnic, and social border zone, we run the risk of underrating a huge barrier in relation to issues regarding a lusophone context. Beyond the difficulties of finding sources and information retrieval, due to the thirty-year-long civil war following the declaration of independence of Angola in 1975, the way leading to a well-grounded interpretation is full of obstacles caused by the exposure to exploited and abused interpretative patterns concealed behind myths, traditions, and rhetoric smothering Portuguese overseas expansion. The unavoidable clash with powerful myths fuelled by Lusotropicalism or by a well-established, centuries-old colonial rhetorical tradition, for instance, have characterized and affected the Portuguese vision of its own overseas empire, rendering the celebration of a presumed widespread Creoleness according to propagandist demands.

The most pernicious tendency affecting Lusotropicalism—a special affinity for the tropics that the Portuguese, according to the Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, entertained to a greater extent than other Europeans—is probably the association of all the former Portuguese dominions under a common idea of joy-

ful miscegenation. That would be the effect made possible by the innate capacity of adaptation peculiar to the Portuguese abroad and by the expansion of their faith and values by means of a cultural dialogue that, rude and all-loving at the same time, ensured a space of interaction between Europeans and natives. It is a tempting and easily exploitable theorization that does not bear up to more exhaustive examination. Comparing realities such as the Brazilian and the Angolan seems a quite daring operation, even if solely under a sociological point of view, as Gilberto Freyre did. The original colonization of Brazil, for instance, was executed through the establishment of a feudal system based on donations. The *capitães*, who were both landlords and managers of property, could dispose of resources allowing them to buy or hunt for slaves and feed them, build quarters and plantations, equip private armies, raise forts and hire garrisons.

Quite different was the fate of the poor settler coming—and often forced to come—from Minho or the Azores Islands, who disembarked alone and semi-naked on the African coast with no protection or resources to help him face the unkind climatic conditions and find his way through the wilderness.

### **The first encounter and a disruptive colonization**

The starting point of the troubled colonization of Angola coincided with the first encounter between Europeans and subjects of the so-called Kingdom of Congo. It occurred in 1482 when King D. João II sent a young commoner named Diogo Cão with an assortment of stone pillars surmounted by the cross of the Order of Christ and carved with the royal arms to mark the capes he should discover. When Diogo Cão stumbled on the Congo River, he was actually looking for something else: a passage around Africa into the Indian Ocean. He travelled to the mouth of the river, where he set up a pillar, left four messengers to search for a great king about whom he had heard and took four natives back to Portugal. Back in Lisbon, King D. João knighted Diogo Cão and appointed him to be the commander of a second expedition, sent out to recover the messengers, whose foremost assignment was to establish amicable relations with the Congolese.

Those friendly relations facilitated the settlement of missionaries, traders and soldiers, but the attempt to christianise the Kingdom of Congo through the conversion of subaltern chiefs proved ephemeral. In addition to that, the slave extraction and export, which subsequently developed, soared to 60,000

in the first two decades and to 345,000 from 1506-1575. Portuguese intentions to maintain good relations with the Congo people were rapidly sacrificed to profit (VV. AA. 50).

In 1575, carrying credentials from King D. Sebastião, Paulo Dias de Novais landed on the Ilha de Luanda in command of a fleet of seven ships carrying a hundred families of colonists and 400 soldiers. The following year, de Novais moved to the mainland opposite the island and established the settlement that was to become São Paulo de Assunção de Luanda. What attracted de Novais to the area was the prospect of controlling the legendary silver mines of Cambambe, a utopia that fuelled Portuguese dreams and desires for a long time. Luanda and the São Paulo settlement offered a sheltered port in an excellent spot very close to the river Kwanza, the supposed route to the mines (VV. AA. 75).

Over time, this area became the departure point of the *Kwata Kwata* wars to capture slaves—*Kwata* actually means “to catch” in the Kimbundu language—and the assembly and loading point for slave ships bound for Brazil. Basically, the development of Brazilian sugar plantations and the exploitation of Brazilian gold mines towards the end of the seventeenth century utterly depended on slave labour provided by Angola. The brisk trade in slaves brought more colonists and the settlement grew. There followed a long period in which Brazil and Angola were intimately connected under the aegis of the Portuguese crown, whose African policies were dictated by the economic interests of its South American dominion. Portuguese colonial policies had to take into account the fact that the administration of such a vast portion of land with so little available Portuguese manpower could not do without the use of local collaborators.

Angola understandably attracted few permanent settlers. The territory was portrayed as savage and forbidding and Europeans generally regarded the climatic and sanitary conditions as prohibitive. Malaria was rampant throughout the land and the colony well deserved its reputation as a “white man’s grave.” The practice of miscegenation and cultural assimilation was the only means by which the Portuguese could respond to the pressure exerted by rival colonial powers but, more than that, it ostensibly provided the only chance of survival for the small number of colonizer agents, overwhelmingly male, sent to make their way in such an adverse environment.<sup>2</sup> Portuguese men absorbed African legacies through intermarriage, giving birth to a society—unique in the African context—in which mulattos enjoyed some kind of status.



Here lies the stepping-stone towards the formation of the so-called urban Creole elites and the first important clarification to underscore. Even if we are going to deal predominantly with the cultural aspects involved in this kind of society, it has to be recalled that the life of the colony was completely focused on trade and colonial administration, and that the concept of “cultural elite” has always to be subordinated to the concept of “economic elite.”

According to Ana Mafalda Leite, Portugal had no other option but to reach working compromises with the Afro-Portuguese local “oligarchies,” for they had already travelled inland and so had a better knowledge of the land’s physical and social geography, adapted as they were to the local populations, with whom they used to trade (Leite 105). By the middle of the eighteenth century, a significant proportion of “sons of the country” and mulattos were already occupying positions within the middle cadres of administration and armed forces, operating as a buffer between emissaries of the metropolis and the native population, who were divided into nine major ethno-linguistic groups: Kikongo (or Bakongo), Kimbundu, Lunda-Quico (or Tchokwe), Mbundo (or Ovimbundu), Ganguela, Nhaneca-Humbe, Ambo, Herero, and Xindonga. All were more or less hostile to external penetration and periodically embroiled the Portuguese in insidious small-scale conflicts, preventing them from reaching an effective detribalisation of the hinterland and discouraging the creation of more extended settlements or the implementation of *fazendas*. Until the end of the nineteenth century the overwhelming majority of whites were confined to Luanda and a handful of coastal towns, such as Benguela—founded in 1617—and later Moçâmedes—founded in 1840.

### The abolition process

The progressive loss of the network of trading posts along the Asian shores,<sup>3</sup> followed in 1821 by the more traumatic loss of Brazil, forced Portugal to make the most out of the remnants of its empire. However, it was by now plain that the traditional purely mercantilist approach to the exploitation of the African territories was no longer an alternative to the model set up by rival colonial powers, nor did it have a chance to survive the advent and implementation of capitalism.

The analysis by René Pélissier confirms that Portugal, at that time, completely lacked human, financial, and technical resources, coherence, and stability in the colonial administration. In Angola, the majority of whites and mulattos—without disregarding the active role played by the so-called “civi-

lized" blacks during the following Portuguese colonial expansion as the backbone of colonial militias—often felt abandoned to themselves by a busted, impotent, or indifferent metropolis.

The persistence of the plundering mentality among them was a frequent cause of conflict (Pélissier 107). The troubled steps leading to the abolition of slavery heightened social tensions and worsened the economic crisis affecting the agonizing Portuguese empire. In the 1830s, the Portuguese government appointed a progressive prime minister, the former minister of the navy, Marquis Sá da Bandeira, whose most important reform was the abolition of the slave trade in 1836. The decree could not be enforced adequately—it took Britain's naval intervention to put an end to the activity in the middle of the nineteenth century—and, above all, it did not include any kind of provision against slavery within Angola.

Between 1854 and 1858 Portugal passed a series of cautious decrees aimed at reducing slavery in Angola. Government slaves were freed and the 1858 proclamation declared that all forms of slavery should be abolished by 1878. Legislation was passed to compensate owners and to care for the freed people, but many of the colonists found ways to circumvent the decree, so that the actual conditions of labour did not change significantly (Coleção 151-52; qtd. in Brásio, *Vol.* 2 44-47). The de facto servitude of Africans in Angola continued until the end of the colonial period and later was one of the leading reasons for a sharp rise in nationalist feeling during the prolonged colonial war.

### Urban society

At the top of the mid-nineteenth-century Angolan socio-economic pyramid were the traders who enriched themselves thanks to the slave traffic and barter with the interior. They were established in Luanda's mansions, dominated the import-export trade and were associated with—and played havoc with—political power (Torres 60).<sup>4</sup>

The properly defined white population was far from numerous—only 1830 people estimated in 1846—and this probably affected its impact in terms of influence and extension of power. In contrast, the mulatto population—about 5,770 people at the time<sup>5</sup>—*grosso modo* identified itself ideologically, politically, and economically with the whites, together forming the preponderant element in urban Angolan society. White traders owned the land and managed the capitalization of their activities connected to the Atlantic trade with Brazil, Europe, and the United States. Since the Portuguese occu-

pation, trade had always been instrumental to the existence of the colony. It is not surprising then if more than one governmental resolution strongly jeopardizing local capital—the abolition of the traffic—or openly advantaging the metropolitan bourgeoisie—protectionist customs policies—encountered resistance, which was able to put back the enactment in the colony of decrees considered as a nuisance to the interests of local businesses.

It is important to underline that a remarkably high proportion of the white population was composed of convicts or enriched ex-convicts. Most of those who survived their sentence returned to Portugal but those who enjoyed some measure of commercial success running small businesses or trading with the natives remained, creating roots—that is, mixed race families—and consolidated specific interests that diverged more and more from metropolitan policies such as, for instance, demonstrating strong opposition to the laws enacted by Sá da Bandeira that were leading to the progressive abolition of the slave trade (Torres 61).<sup>6</sup>

From a sociological and psycho-sociological point of view, we can observe how a wide segment of the economically preponderant population was formed by individuals who can be divided into convicts, poor settlers, and *mestiços*, all rejected by the metropolitan society. From that rejection derived, if not a fracture, certainly a series of deep tensions. It cannot be forgotten that the local colonial society was also layered between “civilized” and “non-civilized” people. The first definition grouped the whites, regardless of their social, economic, and academic standing, and the acculturated mulattos and blacks who had adopted European habits and customs. Black people who kept on living according to the native way of life, that is to say “those who, born overseas from native mother and father, could not differentiate themselves through their own education and customs from the common representative of their race,” were judicially considered as “non-civilized.”<sup>7</sup> This division obviously caused various frictions because of the social and racial discriminations implied, and the resulting concerns rapidly found vent in the local press, and were backed on one side by the settlers aiming to safeguard the *status quo*, criticising the authorities if they allowed mulattos and blacks to intervene in the colony’s public life and, on the other side, by the Africans, protesting against social injustice and claiming social emancipation.

In 1890, the journalist José da Fontes Pereira suggested, in an article published in the *Arauto Africano*, that if the British wanted to trade with the “masters of the country” they had better address themselves directly to Africans, and not to the Portuguese. But who were these “Africans”? Retailers

and civil servants; provincial senate and provincial government officers, magistrates, clerks, copyists, and subordinate staff; customs treasurers, agents, collectors, and scribes; lawyers and court-room employees; garrison, recruiting-centre, and fortress commanders, warrant officers and privates; chaplains, minor, and regular canons, deacons and parish priests; land or estate owners: here is an outline of the range of positions and, consequently, of the scale of power reached by this Euro-African elite during the cycle of slavery and its slow decadence over the course of the nineteenth century. The conjunction of these sectors enables us to understand how this kind of colonial bourgeoisie was deeply rooted in Angola and disconnected from the metropolis, and how its economic links were far stronger with Brazil—or better with the Brazilian colonial bourgeoisie involved with the traffic—than with Portugal.

In conclusion, on one side, the colonial bourgeoisie and the metropolitan bourgeoisie were complementary but, on the other, far from sharing a constant and absolute reciprocal identification, they were divided by deep divergences and opposing economic interests. From the mid-nineteenth century, a constantly increasing number of Portuguese settlers started to disembark, but on land they found this already well-established and—if not cultivated—at least literate local bourgeoisie, Portuguese-speaking, mixed race, Catholic, cosmopolitan, and composed also of mulatto and black people. Adelino Torres refers to the existence of an authentic *colonial bourgeoisie* mainly based in Luanda and Benguela which embraced a class of proprietors employing servile or indentured manpower and possessing assets, material values, capital, prestige, and influence in the colony, regardless of any possible interest or possession held in Portugal or Brazil, and of the ethnic group to which they belonged.

Other than the coffee plantation owners, clearly an elite among the colonists, the Portuguese settlers were poor, unskilled, and uneducated, and, on the whole, they failed to succeed as agriculturists. Unable to compete with Africans and without resources, they moved to the cities and survived as best they could by doing menial jobs. Their presence invariably led to an atmosphere of racism and petty discrimination that affected both black African people and the Creoles of the cities, who of course did not remain silent.

### The “free press” period

The tumultuous period of the Portuguese civil wars (1828-1834) led the metropolis to bankruptcy. At the end of the conflict, the economy was sluggish, unemployment was high, but the formation of a new cabinet coincided



with the spread of a sort of liberal spirit. In 1836, a law passed by Prime Minister Sá da Bandeira extended to the Portuguese overseas possessions the right to print publications that could diffuse essential legal, commercial, and general information to the residents of the colony.

The first rudimentary newspapers turned out to be the main vehicle for local literary proclivities. Luanda and Benguela rapidly became centres of intense cultural activity and of social and political agitation, hosting debates in which French revolutionary ideals were openly supported and developing an advancing will to achieve political autonomy. *O Boletim Oficial*, an official journal founded in 1845 by Governor General Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha, was the starting point of the development of journalism that, supported in the beginning by the small local European elite, was destined to take root in the capital and to rapidly increase during the following decades. By the end of the century, a total of 46 periodicals had been printed, as recorded by Carlos Ervedosa (Ervedosa 28). A decree enacted in 1856 legalized the “free press” in the overseas dominions and, in 1866, the first issue of *A Civilização Africana* was published, a small self-funded weekly publication dedicated to administrative, economic, industrial, and commercial concerns, which inaugurated the second phase of the history of Angolan journalism.

The definition of “free press” is, of course, quite rough if applied to Angola, and it is more correct to say that “settlers and locals tended to define as ‘free press’ the publications issued by private printers, in order to distinguish them from the official governmental gazette” (Ervedosa 25). If it is true that a certain number of publications saw the light during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is also true that their life was never easy, colonial censorship being constantly on the watch.

Just to mention a few episodes that had a strong impact on the local public opinion of the time, in 1842 a printing press had been loaded in Lisbon and bound for Luanda, where it was supposed to be installed. The Portuguese authorities, fearing such a powerful asset in the hands of the natives, decided to turn aside the ship and let it sink off the Moçâmedes coast with its precious cargo. The owner of the printing press was a Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses, a mulatto, coming back to his native land to assume the post of secretary-treasurer in the capital of the colony. Journalist José da Fontes Pereira’s comment shows how the presence of the Portuguese was substantially felt as a burden, hindering every kind of enhancement in the country: “aware of the power that such a skilled politician could deploy using a weapon [the printing press] that is so dangerous to the interests of the



metropolis, in Portugal they preferred to lose a State ship rather than allow this engine of civilization to disembark in Luanda!"<sup>8</sup>

In 1867, António Urbano Monteiro de Castro, Alfredo Mântua, and Francisco Pereira Dutra, popular journalists and editors, were condemned for the crime of abuse of the free press; the latter did not survive his imprisonment. In 1873, the governor general of Angola approved a warrant released by the Luanda council administrator. The premises of the newspaper *O Mercantil* were shut down and any valuable materials confiscated. In 1881, republican journalist José da Ressurreição Arantes Braga was condemned to 40 days imprisonment for sedition. In the same year, issue number 1 of *O Echo de Angola* was the first periodical entirely edited and funded by Africans (Coelho 107-08).

With the launch of the "free press period" the colony of Angola enjoyed a sort of intellectual euphoria. Both "sons of the country" and creolized Portuguese found in this kind of journalism, devoted to the taste for controversy and to the defence of local values and interests, the way to express their heterogeneous positions about politics, trade, but also art, culture, and social criticism, and to uphold their economic and administrative interests against the arrogance shown by some governors, at variance with the most reductive metropolitan policies.

Periodical publications such as *O Arauto Africano*, *A Província de Angola*, and *O Echo de Angola* were the expression of a generation whose primary distinction was a fierce autodidacticism, since higher education was beyond reach for most of its writers and because, generally speaking, it was impossible to pursue further education after completing the first two years of secondary school without leaving Angola.

To this end, the presence of Protestant missionaries was crucial, since they made a reality out of the ideology of "self-sufficiency" by opening school rooms where they would valorise local knowledge and oral literature, which they even tried to fix into written languages, drawing up grammars and dictionaries. Most of the missions were established in the northern part of the country, where Portuguese penetration was superficial and the colonial authorities had no choice but to tolerate the thriving of foreign commercial enterprises and missions, which helped the locals involved to develop a critical sense and to take into consideration their African roots, serving as a testing ground for the creation of a national literature.<sup>9</sup>

### The Berlin Conference and the times of the 1890 Ultimatum

The abolition of the slave trade coincided with increased Portuguese expansion in Angola. Expansion began in 1838 with the conquest and establishment of a fort at Duque de Bragança (present-day Calandula), east of Luanda. By the mid-century, the Portuguese had extended their formal control still farther east to the Kassanje market near the Cuango River. In 1840 the Portuguese founded the town of Moçâmedes (present-day Namibe) on the coast south of Benguela. The Portuguese also attempted to gain control of the coast from Luanda north to Cabinda through military occupation of the major ports. Because of British opposition, however, they were unable to complete this attempt and never gained control of the mouth of the Congo River.

The cost of military operations to secure economically strategic points led in 1856 to the imposition on Africans of a substantially increased hut tax, which for the first time had to be paid with currency or trade goods rather than with slaves. As a result, many Africans either refused to pay or fled from Portuguese-controlled areas. By 1861, in any case, the Portuguese lacked the resources for continued military expansion or economic development, and most of the interior remained in the control of African traders and warriors.

From the late 1870s through to the early 1890s, Portugal promoted a renewed program of expansion in the interior. Part of the impetus came from the Lisbon Geographical Society, founded in 1875 by a group of industrialists, scholars, and colonial and military officials. In reaction to the activities of the society, to the subsequent wave of popular concern for the colonies diffused through the country, and to the growing interest among Europeans in colonial adventures, the Portuguese government allotted large sums for public works in Africa and encouraged a minor revival of missionary work (Papagno 100-01).

During the 1870s, an advisory commission to Portugal's Ministry of the Navy and Colonies conceived the project to link Angola on the Atlantic coast with Mozambique on the Indian Ocean coast, counting on the support provided by the Portuguese government, which aspired to control a solid strip of territory across the central part of the continent.<sup>10</sup> Portugal was, in fact, unable to gain effective control of the hinterland. Aware of French and Belgian activities on the lower Congo River, in 1883 the Portuguese occupied Cabinda and Massabi north of the Congo River, towns that Portugal had long claimed. In the same year, Portugal annexed the region of the old Congo Kingdom. Seeking to uphold these claims against French and Belgian

advances in the Congo River Basin, Portugal negotiated a treaty with Britain in 1884. The other European powers, however, rejected it.

At the Berlin Conference of 1884, the participants established in principle the limits of Portugal's claims to Angola, and, in later years, a series of treaties with the colonial powers in control of the neighbouring territories delineated Angola's boundaries. The west coast territory acquired by Portugal included the left bank of the Congo River and the Cabinda enclave. In 1890, however, Britain delivered an ultimatum to force Portugal's withdrawal from Nyasaland (present-day Malawi) and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe and Zambia).

The nominal occupation of large areas of the ocean coast by the Portuguese was a clear obstacle to the claims of rival colonial powers, while the inner parts of the continent remained unseen and still uncharted. The political and financial problems affecting the Portuguese crown made easier a shift in the balance of power in Africa. In addition, the Berlin Conference internationally established a variation of the overpowering policy from the traditional right conferred by original discovery to the right granted by effective occupation.

The Berlin Conference, whose four main issues were the commercial opening of the Congo region, the suppression of slavery in that area, the freedom of navigation on every African river, and the procedures to follow for the future occupations on the continent, imposed the right of effective occupation. In this way, the recognition, on the part of aboriginal chieftains and natives, of the sovereignty exercised by a European power over the territories traditionally belonging to one or more ethnic groups prevailed over any validity of the historical rights claimed by Portugal (Allain 23).

By the end of the conference, it was universally clear that untenable Portuguese dreams of glory had to be abandoned and that the presence of ruined outposts would no longer guarantee full—nominal—dominion of a territory. The approach to the overseas resources had to be rapidly overturned in order to avoid the otherwise inevitable perspective of losing also the remnants of the empire.

During the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century the course of events seemed to quicken. The British ultimatum, the subsequent formalisation of the Portuguese empire and the entrenchment of Lusitanian patriotism led, in a desperate attempt to scoop foreign competition, to the implementation of some meaningful changes in the administration of the colonies. The pressure of the "scramble for Africa" and the British threat, together with the European demand for raw materials and tropical products, were powerful stimuli for investment in Angola's vast potential wealth.

In 1892, a protective tariff was introduced, which led to a significant increase in trade between Portugal and Africa. That increase was particularly marked for Portugal's exports to Africa and for African exports to third countries, shipped through Portugal as re-exports (Lains 10). After the abolition of slavery, the production of export goods such as coffee or cotton required measures to tie the population to the land. A successful and effective colonization could not proceed without strict control of the African populations, not only because it was necessary to provide a labour force for the plantations, but also because it granted a huge tax revenue. In 1899 a new labour code was imposed on all African natives in the form of a "moral and legal" obligation to work (Lains 15-16).

The 1892 tariffs and the 1899 labour code were the landmarks of the new colonial regime imposed by Portugal on its African colonies. Perhaps the adoption of these measures, which brought important benefits for Portuguese colonization, was delayed simply to strengthen the bargaining position of the country during the scramble for territory and the diplomatic negotiations concerning African borders in the 1880s. It was evident by now that the government's interest in Africa had sharply increased, as is shown by the fact that the position of governor general of Angola, for instance, obtained a new status that attracted men who managed to impose a tighter administrative control over the territories.

In this way, a penal colony such as Angola was gradually transformed into a colony of occupation, to the detriment of the thousands of *contratados*, contract workers employed in the plantations in a semi-slave regime, but also of the Creole elites, progressively forced to cede rights, privileges, and positions to the new administrative, military, and commercial staff who arrived from the metropolis.

### The fall of the Creole elites

At the turn of the century, a series of decrees gradually established that the issue of any kind of publication, periodical or not, had to be considered as a crime of "free press abuse." As the repressive measures adopted by the metropolis and the subsequent worsening of the basic rights situation in the colony roused the reaction of *Angolense* intellectuals, Portuguese colonial policy was consolidated by new internal wars and occupations, by the country-wide installment of administrative units and by the enhancement of economic development. Although there were fewer than 10,000 whites in Angola in 1900, there had been a substantial increase in white female immigration. The male-to-female ratio that year was slightly more than two-to-

one.<sup>11</sup> Concomitantly, there was a drop in the ratio of *mestiços*-to-whites. Whereas *mestiços* had outnumbered whites in 1845 by more than three-to-one, in 1900 this ratio was reversed. Of course, black Africans still constituted more than 99 percent of the population, even if their number reportedly declined from an estimated 5.4 million in 1845 to about 4.8 million in 1900, although scholars dispute these figures. Even today, Angola's census problems are far from being solved.

In the late nineteenth century, Africans still controlled trade in the plateaus of the interior, despite Portuguese expansion. The Ovimbundu proved highly successful intermediaries on the southern trade route that ran from the Bié Plateau to Benguela. The Ovimbundu were more competitive than the *sertanejos* (people of the frontier, as Europeans and their usually mulatto representatives in the rural areas were called), who often had to pay tribute and fines to African chiefs if they wanted to cross their territories. By the mid 1880s, the Ovimbundu by and large had replaced the *sertanejos*. The Tchokwe and Imbangala<sup>12</sup> also took advantage of their positions in the interior to extend their control over the region's trade. Nonetheless, by the late 1800s, Portuguese encroachments and the imposition of European rule limited the political freedom of these Africans and diminished their prosperity.

Immigration changes came into full effect and competition for places that were traditionally the prerogative of Luso-Africans became ruthless, upsetting the previous politico-economical and socio-cultural schemes. The recently arrived settlers forced both old towns and small demographic nuclei to undertake new economic and cultural activities and, crushed by the colonial wave, black and mulatto natives tended to quit the towns and recede to the *musseques* (shantytowns). Consequently, the role model provided by the journalistic activity that previously invigorated the social life of the colony and by the, even if troubled, diffusion of local and small periodical publications gradually lost its fundamental role. Once it had become clear that the local political debate that had stimulated so many young *Angolenses* was outmoded, and that internal and export trade, demographic development, and the new pace assumed by society gave life to concerns that could have been hardly satisfied by a periodical press, the local colonial bourgeoisie had to let go of the control of its environment. It was no longer possible to liven up the political life of towns like Luanda and Benguela with such small resources.

In 1909, the journal *O Angolense* was suppressed, due to a misunderstanding between its founding members, Francisco das Necessidades



Castelbranco—director—Augusto Silvério Ferreira and Pedro da Paixão Franco—editors—and Eusébio Velasco Galiano—publisher—and by a legal process to which the journal was subjected. In 1913, Governor General Norton de Matos ordered the suspension of the *Independente* and *A Verdade*, deeming that they posed a profound material danger to the colony's stability. The suspension endured several months and the Cortes of Portugal were summoned to discuss the matter.

Finally, a decree issued on 31 July 1916 established the application of precautionary censorship to periodicals and other publications, to be exerted by districts and council commissions (Lourenço 7). The gilded age of the Creole communities was definitely over.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 1948 is a year marked by the foundation of the cultural movement known as *Movement of the New Intellectuals of Angola*, or "*Vamos descobrir Angola*" [Let's discover Angola], whose purpose was to give expression to popular concerns and to promote the emergence of black African consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> The male-female ratio among whites in Angola was around 2:1 in 1900 (Bender 52). However, in 1869, the Spiritan missionary Hippolyte Carrie was firmly convinced that the recently founded town of Moçâmedes would be the only salubrious spot on the coast and therefore the best place to start a new mission. Aiming to persuade his superiors about the harsh conditions affecting other Angolan towns, he supported his views by quoting the following extract: "White women, there are none. Nor could there be, for they'd die for sure, especially if they were still of age to give birth. Until now, there is not a single case in which a white woman or child has survived after delivery" (qtd. in Brásio).

<sup>3</sup> By 1640 the Portuguese pepper empire in Asia had entered its twilight years. Despite this economic decline, India featured as a romantic colossus in the Portuguese popular imagination. The empire of the east still contained fifty-odd beachheads, fortresses, trading factories and islands stretching from the Zambesi to the Pacific, including Ormuz, Diu, Damão, Goa, Cochim, Malaca, East Timor, and Macau (Birmingham 43).

<sup>4</sup> According to the data collected by the Portuguese economist the following activities were exercised in Luanda in 1845:

- Wholesale houses ... 33
- General stores ... 35
- Wine, oil, and retail sellers ... 107
- Informal retailers selling on the streets ... 113
- Water-selling houses ... 16
- Bakers ... 7
- Apothecary's shops ... 5
- Butchers ... 5
- Cigar factories ... 1

<sup>5</sup> Data confirmed in Lipski and in Bender.

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that, from 1859-60, the emancipation of the "Angolan homeland" becomes a concern for the restless sons of the country, labelled by Torres as "non-white civilized people," even if they did not know exactly whether to give life to a Republic of Angola or join the Brazilian Republic—or the United States of America. The latter hypothesis suggests the need to maintain a strict contact with slave-buying countries.

<sup>7</sup> As established through decree in 1894 by the General Government of the Province of Angola, according to Lourenço (2).

<sup>8</sup> See Pereira, qtd. in Pacheco (141-42).

<sup>9</sup> The speech given by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Count de Castro, during the Chamber of Deputies session on 14 March 1866, shows the effects of the lack of Portuguese military forces on the northern coast of Angola: "American, British, French and Hamburger trading posts deal with the natives to our detriment, for they don't pay a penny for embarked and disembarked goods. That produces a considerable loss, since our traders, having to pay heavy customs duties, cannot compete in any way with foreign traders. It must be said that the importance of Angola resides entirely in its trade: if we cannot make the most of it, there's no reason for us to go on" (qtd. in Brásio, *Vol. 1* 295-96).

<sup>10</sup> Between 1877 and 1879, Serpa Pinto made the first expedition from coast to coast led by a Portuguese from Benguela to Durban. This expedition, however, did not have official support from Lisbon and, more importantly, it crossed areas not claimed by Portugal.

Between 1884 and 1885, Capelo and Ivens, this time with official support, crossed the continent, along a strip between parallels 15° and 18° (south), from Moçamedes, in southern Angola, to Quelimane, in northern Mozambique. Two years later, with the apparent agreement of the German government, the Foreign Office in Lisbon produced the famous rose-coloured map, claiming that portion of territory that would unite Portugal's two colonies in southern Africa.

<sup>11</sup> The statistics for 1900 are found in Bender (20).

<sup>12</sup> The Imbangala were not a distinct ethnic group, but a sort of cult that held together bands of mercenary soldiers who lived both by general rapine and by hiring themselves out to the highest bidder. They operated in the Kimbundu-speaking world and were also consciously and openly cannibals.

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