



Kalle Kananoja

Central African Identities and Religiosity in Colonial Minas Gerais



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Maps



Map 1: West Central Africa in the eighteenth century



Map 2: Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century

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1 Introduction

1.1 Main Issues and Aims of the Study

The captaincy of Minas Gerais in the interior of Brazil developed into the world's largest gold producing region at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The large-scale mining of gold, and later diamonds, was only possible through the mass importation of slaves from Africa to Brazil.¹ When the mining industry began to wane in the middle of the century, economic activity turned towards agriculture. During these phases, the economy was always fuelled by the labor of African slaves.² The focus of this study is on the transatlantic links between West Central Africa³ and Brazil, and concerns slaves who arrived in Minas Gerais from Central Africa during the eighteenth century. The life of these individuals in Portuguese Angola and the surrounding areas was disrupted by the violent experience of enslavement, and those who survived the Atlantic crossing had to endure inhumane conditions that left them psychologically wounded and traumatized. Despite their humiliating experiences many of them managed to create a meaningful life in slavery in Brazil, and some even regained their freedom. Rather than regarding slaves as passive or powerless actors in the shaping of American cultures, the contention is that a large number of slaves in Brazil found ways of cultural expression and were in charge of their own life despite the difficulties they encountered. This study seeks to answer how this was possible.

While the study of the Atlantic World has been in vogue during the past two decades, the southern Atlantic has not attracted much attention from Anglophone historians.⁴ Moreover, the African continent has played only a marginal role in many studies despite its centrality to the economic, social, political, and cultural development in Atlantic history.⁵ Unlike in the Anglophone

¹ The classic study of eighteenth century Brazil, including the expansion of mining in Minas Gerais, is Boxer 1962. For a more recent examination of gold production, see Russell-Wood 1987.

² Bergad 1999.

³ Following recent trends in the historiography, I will use the terms West Central Africa and Central Africa interchangeably throughout this study. The geographic limitation of this region is discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁴ For conceptualizations of the Atlantic World, see Gilroy 1993; Bailyn 2005; and various essays in Falola and Roberts, eds., 2008; Greene and Morgan, eds., 2009.

⁵ Many scholars have recently pointed to this and other deficiencies in the concept of Atlantic history, e.g. Coclanis 2002 and 2006; Cañizares-Esguerra 2003. For Games 2006, p. 754, “[t]he most urgent and immediate challenge is to restore Africa to the Atlantic.”

Atlantic World of North America and the Caribbean, direct European mediation in the maintenance of the transatlantic system in the Southern Hemisphere was bypassed to a considerable extent. Brazilian merchants and seamen played a central role in this Brazilian centered world, which was ethnically and racially complex. The Africans who went to Brazil shaped the demographic, linguistic, cultural, economic, political, and religious formation of the country, while Brazilians, whether of European or African background, and often mixed, also affected the demographic, economic, political, religious, and cultural composition of the towns and commercial centers of West Central Africa. To this has to be added the influences brought to Africa by European merchants, officers, and missionaries.

This cultural complex is at the heart of this research, with the main focus lying on Central Africans and their cultural identities in the *capitania* of Minas Gerais. However, Central African cultural practices were shaped by extensive contact with Portuguese and Brazilian traders, administrators, and missionaries, leading to considerable creolization in Central Africa, so that many slaves from this region arrived in Brazil under the influence of the cultural mixing that was taking place in their home societies. It is thus necessary to begin this inquiry in the Portuguese *Reino de Angola*, which took shape from the late fifteenth century onwards, and surrounding areas. The point of departure for this study is that ideas and practices originating outside Africa had an impact on Central African culture, but was this impact more than superficial? Furthermore, the mechanisms under which these cultural values were preserved in Brazil are scrutinized. For example, what cultural features were transferred to Minas Gerais by Central African slaves, and how did these features manifest and transform there during the eighteenth century?

Thus, the focus of this research is twofold. First, to shed light on cultural processes on the African side of the Atlantic during the era of the slave trade. The fundamental questions are: who were the slaves taken to Brazil, and what did they take with them in terms of cultural values and assumptions? Second, to discover what happened to the Central African slaves in Minas Gerais. Were they able to recreate their identities in slavery and, if they did, what role did their regional background play in this identity formation? How were their identities manifested in their daily life? The first part of this study addresses collective group identities of Central Africans, while the second part focuses more specifically on religious identities.

These questions have to be placed in both global and local contexts. The interactions in the southern Atlantic were clearly tied to the wider Portuguese colonial world, which had its center in Lisbon and outposts in Africa, Brazil, and Asia. In this global context, it is impossible to study the slave trade in Africa without taking into account the developments in the wider colonial

world. In the current case, the increasing demand for slaves in Minas Gerais from the beginning of the eighteenth century was a factor that stimulated the slave trade in the Brazilian ports, as well as in Luanda and Benguela in Central Africa. However, when analyzed at a micro-level, the level of the individual, the context has to be localized. The Atlantic slave trade, instead of being an isolated sphere of activity, always reflected the “logic of local interests”.⁶ On both sides of the Atlantic, documentation is sufficiently extensive to enable local analysis as well.

The cultural and linguistic unity of Central Africans makes it sensible to study them as a group in eighteenth-century *mineiro* society. Slenes has studied Central Africans in South-West Brazil in the nineteenth century in this manner. He points out that slaves from the far interior of West Central Africa who arrived at the coast for export to the Americas easily learned the Kimbundu language that served as a lingua franca in the area. This was because the Bantu languages were sufficiently similar to be mutually intelligible both grammatically and lexically. According to Slenes, communication between Central Africans in Brazil was not dependent on learning a European language, i.e. Portuguese or a pidgin, because they could communicate in their own language or, at least, in a language very similar to their mother tongue.⁷

Hawthorne’s study of slaves transported from the Upper Guinea coast to Amazonia further shows that analysis of the lives of a limited group of Africans transported to a certain New World destination is highly relevant, as this approach seeks to connect the diasporic communities to their homelands.⁸ Although this study similarly concentrates on a limited group of Africans who shared the same regional origin, it is not suggested that Central Africans in Minas Gerais be studied as a completely isolated group that did not have any contact with West African or Brazilian-born slaves, and freedmen or the white population. The aim is to demonstrate the role that these individuals’ Central African background played in strategies of identity formation and cultural recreation in their new home community. This study contends that it is crucial to understand the African background of various cultural practices that were manifest in Brazil.

⁶ Harms 2002, p. xix.

⁷ Slenes 1991-1992, 1999, 2002, 2006. The Central African component in eighteenth-century Brazil has also been studied in Karasch 2002 and 2004, whose research focused on the captaincy of Goiás in Central Brazil.

⁸ Hawthorne 2010.

1.2 Overview of the Literature

1.2.1 The Slave Trade between Angola and Brazil and its Cultural Implications

The most important development to affect interest in the modern study of the Atlantic slave trade was the African decolonization process and the rise of independent African republics. At the same time, the success of the civil rights movement in the United States led to a growth in studies of Afro-American and African history. This increased the interest in precolonial African history, of which the slave trade was an important part. Philip Curtin's book *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, published in 1969, created a major new impetus for slave trade studies.⁹ Curtin tried to estimate the volume of the trade from available secondary and published studies. He concluded that a total of between eight and 11 million Africans were transported to the Americas. Curtin's study led to a long debate about the number of slaves exported from Africa during the centuries of the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁰

The study of the slave trade has taken enormous steps forward in the four decades since the publication of Philip Curtin's groundbreaking statistical study. The patient work of dedicated historians has made detailed information on the slave trade available in the online *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* (TSTD), which not only provides detailed information on individual slave shipments across the Atlantic but also tools for statistical analysis and estimates of the full volume of the trade. The database lists all documented slaving voyages that traversed the Atlantic,¹¹ and offers a calculated estimate of the total volume of the trade.¹² The estimated number of enslaved Africans who arrived in Brazil between 1561 and 1856 is almost 4.9 million, over ten times as many as went to mainland North America and almost as many as the total number who went to the entire Caribbean and North America combined.¹³ Eltis, Behrendt and Richardson, who analyzed the slave trade on national lines, have determined that Portuguese ships, usually defined as vessels owned by Portuguese nationals living mainly in Brazil, were critically important in the

⁹ Curtin 1969.

¹⁰ For a summary of the literature up to 1989, see Lovejoy 1989.

¹¹ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> (quoted 14 June, 2011). The database was originally published on a CD-Rom (Eltis et al. 1998), but the web-based database, published in 2008, has been updated with more recent findings – a process that still continues. For an overview of the database, see Eltis and Richardson 2008.

¹² <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces> (quoted 14 June, 2011). As is the case with any trade, the Atlantic slave trade included smuggling for which there are no official records. Another reason for the need for an estimate is that archival sources have been destroyed.

¹³ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces> (quoted 14 June, 2011).

transportation of slaves.¹⁴

The great majority of enslaved Africans, over 3.8 million, sent to Brazil came from Angola and other parts of West Central Africa, yet the cultural interconnections between Angola and Brazil have to a large extent been neglected in research, although many studies have shown that strong commercial links existed between Angola and Brazil. Slaves were exchanged in Angola for a variety of trade goods, including alcohol, tobacco, textiles, firearms, and trinkets. Luso-Brazilian capital, shipping, and business networks linked not only slave traders but also dealers in manufactured goods and produce across the Atlantic basin, with links to the Indian Ocean as well. Over time, in Angola, the growth of slave exports meant more foreign goods in circulation to a wider range of people.

The organization of the slave trade in Central Africa has been studied extensively. The early works by David Birmingham, Phyllis Martin, and Robert Harms focused almost solely on the African side of the trade. Birmingham pioneered the study of Angolan history in the Anglophone world. His examination of the Mbundu kingdoms of Angola was based on archival sources in Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, and Rome as well as on published materials. The main lines of Angolan political history and the expansion of slave trading in Central Africa from the fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century were clearly delineated by Birmingham.¹⁵ Martin's work, although dealing with the slave trade on the Loango coast, which was dominated by Dutch, French, and English traders, is also concerned with wider regional features of the trade in an area where the Portuguese certainly felt that their influence and trading activities were threatened.¹⁶ Similarly, Harms has dealt with a geographical area, namely the central Zaire (now, the Congo River) basin, that fell under the Portuguese sphere of interest, although slaves from this area were mostly diverted to the hands of French, Dutch, and British traders. Besides investigating the development of the trade, Harms analyzed the formation of ethnic alliances along the Congo River.¹⁷

Joseph Miller has investigated the history of Central Africa in a number of monographs and articles. Miller's *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730-1830* sought to examine the connections created by the slave trade between Africa, Brazil, and Portugal. Miller mapped the flows of commercial capital in the southern Atlantic and demonstrated how increasing imports spread throughout West Central Africa. According to Miller, a prominent and permanent aspect of the political and

¹⁴ Eltis, Behrendt and Richardson 2005.

¹⁵ Birmingham 1966.

¹⁶ Martin 1972.

¹⁷ Harms 1981.

economic transformation in Africa during the Atlantic slave trade was the emergence of a commercial economy and society within the African use-value environment. This transformation was due to the activities of African and Luso-African traders, Brazilian slavers, and metropolitan merchants. Miller argued that the slaving frontier pushed the cycles of violence increasingly inland as the eighteenth century progressed, bringing people living in the far interior of West Central Africa into the orbit of the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁸

Since the publication of Miller's groundbreaking study, perspectives on the Angolan slave trade have been broadened by Jose Curto's work on the alcohol trade in Angola, which demonstrates how the consumption of alcohol in and around Luanda and Benguela fuelled the trade in slaves. Distilled alcohol in the form of sugar cane brandy, or *gerebita* as it came to be known in West Central Africa, originated from the Brazilian ports of Salvador, Recife, and Rio de Janeiro. The expanding gold mining industry in Minas Gerais in the early eighteenth century fuelled the urban economy of Rio de Janeiro and its rural sugar plantations. During the course of the eighteenth century, colonial traders in Rio de Janeiro became the leading Brazilian suppliers of *gerebita* imported into Luanda, the colonial capital of Angola.¹⁹

Whereas Curto's work centered on the alcohol trade, Roquinaldo Ferreira focused on the trade in textiles. His unpublished doctoral dissertation examines the decline of the trade in Luanda in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and how it operated during the eighteenth century in Benguela. Ferreira addressed the role of imports of foreign goods into Angola. He particularly focused on Indian textiles, which were widely traded for slaves and used as currency and social artifacts in African societies. According to Ferreira, taste and fashion played a pivotal role in the imports of textiles. The dissertation also shows how merchants based in Brazil came to dominate the trade in Indian textiles.²⁰ Mariana Candido also focused on slave trading networks in the interior of Benguela, showing that people were enslaved from coastal areas and further into the interior, thus challenging Miller's thesis of a slaving frontier that pushed progressively inland during the eighteenth century.²¹

Questions of a socio-cultural nature have been included in previous studies that have focused largely on the economics of the slave trade, and thus are also relevant to the present study. These questions have been articulated most clearly by John Thornton, whose book, *The Kingdom of Kongo: Civil War and Transition 1641-1718*, as well as his other works, deals with social and religious life in the history of the kingdom of Kongo. Thornton's analysis of the influence

¹⁸ Miller 1988.

¹⁹ Curto 2002 and 2004.

²⁰ Ferreira 2003.

²¹ Candido 2006.

of Catholicism in Kongo is especially important when trying to understand how religious values were interpreted and re-interpreted by Africans in Minas Gerais.²² Another interpretation of Christianity in Kongo, not always in line with Thornton's, is offered by Anne Hilton, whose study deals extensively with the early history and formation of the kingdom. Hilton also sheds light on the relationships between the rulers of Kongo and European missionaries.²³

The cultural influences that spread throughout West Central Africa following the arrival of the Portuguese in Kongo during the late fifteenth century have been analyzed extensively by Heywood and Thornton. Heywood's article on creolization in Angola traces the changes in both Portuguese and African cultures that occurred in this region during the centuries of the slave trade.²⁴ In a joint work, Heywood and Thornton have argued that, as a result of the spread of slave trading in Central Africa, a specific Atlantic Creole culture emerged. This was manifested in cultural habits such as language, cuisine, naming practices, music, dress, and religious practices. The spread of Atlantic Creole culture is traced in time and space, showing extensive penetration into the interior of Angola by the mid-seventeenth century.²⁵

Although commercial links between Africa and the Americas, and the contours of slavery in Brazil have been extensively studied, the question of cultural continuities and identities in the southern Atlantic world has not attracted as much attention. Researchers have often studied the southern Atlantic world in a compartmentalized manner by treating Africa and the Americas separately, but more recent historical research has sought to reveal the cultural links between Africa and the Americas. Thornton covered this theme comprehensively in his book *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, which examines Africans both in Africa and in the New World. He specified the African cultural groups that were affected by, and were affecting, developments in the Atlantic world. Thornton also focused on the transformations of African culture during the slave trade era, with an emphasis on African religions and Christianity.²⁶

Similar themes have been covered by James Sweet's study of the cultural life of African slaves in the early Portuguese colonial world. Sweet focused on the social and cultural practices that African slaves carried with them throughout the Portuguese colonial world. His focus was on the slaves' religion, although he also studied family and kinship formation, and sexual roles in the slave community. Sweet demonstrated that slaves, instead of succumbing to the pressures of slavery and the demands of their masters, used their religious tools,

²² Thornton 1983, 1984, 2002.

²³ Hilton 1985.

²⁴ Heywood 2002.

²⁵ Heywood and Thornton 2007a.

²⁶ Thornton 1998a.

labeled as witchcraft by Europeans, to resist slavery. Africans transferred their cultural values to the Americas, where those values survived in large measure. Sweet went on to characterize seventeenth-century Brazilian slave culture as essentially Central African.²⁷ Sweet's and Thornton's studies could both be taken as the starting points for the present work.

1.2.2 Africans and Their Descendants in *Mineiro* Society

The study of slavery in Brazil has flourished during the past two decades, especially after the centenary in 1988 of the abolition of slavery in the country. The general introductions published in English that preceded the centenary include the works of Russell-Wood and Mattoso, both valuable in outlining the general aspects of the slaves' condition in Brazil. While Mattoso's work describes in detail the institution of slavery and the manumission processes, Russell-Wood emphasizes the role of freed blacks and mulattos in Brazilian history and also delves at length into the institution of slavery in the gold-mining regions of Minas Gerais, noting that economic opportunities in this region offered many slaves greater potential to make the transition to freedom.²⁸

Slavery in Minas Gerais has not been dealt with extensively in English-language historiography. Although articles dealing with aspects of slave control and slave resistance, as well as a local study on slavery in Diamantina appeared in the 1980s,²⁹ it was not until 1999 that major studies dealing with slavery in Minas Gerais appeared. A local study by Kathleen Higgins, concentrating on slavery in Sabará in the eighteenth century, shows that slaves enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in this community. Higgins reaches the conclusion that advancement was gender related, and that the potential to rise in social status was greater for freedwomen than freedmen.³⁰ Laird Bergad has written a sweeping overview of the economics and demographics of slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although it provides a comprehensive overview of the forces that shaped development in Minas Gerais, methodologically some of Bergad's arguments can be criticized for his overtly confident reliance on the use of property inventories as source material. The main weakness regarding property inventories is that they were prepared after a person's death, and although they list, for example, the slaves owned by the deceased, the study of the slave population through the inventories is problematic because they do not specify how long slaves had been held by their owners. Another drawback

²⁷ Sweet 2003.

²⁸ Mattoso 1986; Russell-Wood 2002. The history of slavery in Minas Gerais is also dealt with in Klein and Luna 2010, which looks at the institution of slavery in Brazil as a whole.

²⁹ Vallejos 1985; Ramos 1988.

³⁰ Higgins 1999.

is that the inventories do not reflect the economic wealth of the population as a whole, as the majority of the people probably never left written sources behind.³¹ The lives of Africans and their descendants in Minas Gerais have also been put into comparative perspective by Mariana Dantas, whose study considers urban slavery in Baltimore and Sabará in the eighteenth century.³²

In Brazilian historiography, eighteenth-century Minas Gerais has been subject to innumerable studies, not least because of its economic importance in the history of the Portuguese empire.³³ The demographics of slavery have been studied broadly, starting with the classic studies of Iraci del Nero da Costa and Francisco Vidal Luna in the late 1970s,³⁴ and continuing with the work of scholars such as Clotilde Andrade Paiva, Douglas Cole Libby, and Tarcísio Botelho.³⁵ One of the most heated debates in the demographic history of Minas Gerais concerns the growth of the slave population after the decline of gold production, and whether this should be attributed to an increase through natural reproduction or to the slave population being replenished with imports from Africa. Whatever the reason for the growth of the slave population, and it should be noted that these two extreme explanations are not mutually exclusive, the proportion of Africans in the total population is fairly well-known due to the work of demographic historians.

The ethnic make-up of the African population in Minas Gerais has not been analyzed extensively. Although elements of the ethnic constitution of the African population in different localities have been exposed in various studies, it is still unclear how this ethnic composition changed in time and space. For example, Bergad has presented an overview of the African ethnicities in the population of Minas Gerais between 1715 and 1888, noting that Central Africans, combining together Benguelas, Angolas, and Congos, were the largest group of African slaves, followed by slaves from West Africa generically denominated Minas in Brazil.³⁶ A more comprehensive attempt to analyze the African populations, taking into account chronological and local variations, has been presented by Rodrigo Castro Rezende in his unpublished MA thesis, which seeks to explain what the different classifications attributed to slaves meant, not only for the slave owners, but for the slaves themselves. In Minas Gerais, Africans were forced to adopt classifications that reflected a lack of understanding of diverse African cultural codes. Rezende's work is crucial in

³¹ Bergad 1999.

³² Dantas 2008.

³³ The main trends of eighteenth-century *mineiro* history are exposed in Resende and Villalta, eds., 2007.

³⁴ Costa 1978, 1982; Luna 1981; Luna and Costa 1982a. These and other articles are now collected together in Luna, Costa and Klein 2009.

³⁵ Paiva 1996; Libby 2007; Botelho 2000.

³⁶ Bergad 1999.

tracing the presence of Central Africans in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais.³⁷

Family formation among the slave population is a theme that has been studied increasingly in the Brazilian historiography since the late 1970s.³⁸ Several studies dealing with different communities in Minas Gerais have shown that family formation among slaves was the norm, not an exception, in the eighteenth century. The family life of slaves has been analyzed at least in Mariana,³⁹ Santa Luzia,⁴⁰ Catas Altas do Mato Dentro,⁴¹ and São José do Rio das Mortes.⁴² These studies show that it is perhaps pointless to try to study the slave family in the captaincy of Minas Gerais as a whole because of the economic and social diversity that evolved in the area in the eighteenth century, and because of the mass of the documentation dealing with the issue. However, the ecclesiastical sources employed as evidence for family formation among the slaves also suffer from the drawbacks that slave families were often informal, and couples did not contract Christian marriages. Whether the slave families were more common than has been realized or not, they certainly led to the rapid growth of the *crioulo*, or Brazilian-born, slave population in Minas Gerais. While this study does not address the issue of slave families it must be noted that this was an important sphere of social life in which African identities were manifest.

A description of *mineiro* society would not be complete without the inclusion of freed Africans, or *forros*. The lives of *forros* and *forras*, male and female freed slaves, have been examined by Eduardo França Paiva who studied them through testaments. His study shows that the freeing of slaves through various mechanisms was popular in Minas Gerais, resulting in a large *forro* population in the captaincy.⁴³ He has further examined the slave culture of Minas Gerais in a later study and shown that there was a mix of different ethnicities, traditions, and cultural practices in its cultural universe, giving rise to individuals and groups who were neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Indians. However, cultural hybridization in colonial Brazil did not eliminate spaces, practices, and rituals that were resistant to alteration and adaptation. These spaces existed for Europeans as well as for Africans and Indians, and included practices such as culinary arts; music and dance; festivities and celebrations; religiosity; attire and ornaments; language; technical, medicinal, and magic knowledge; and attitudes linked to birth, marriage, and death.

³⁷ Rezende 2006.

³⁸ Botelho 2007, p. 456.

³⁹ Almeida 1998.

⁴⁰ Corrêa 2005.

⁴¹ Botelho 2007.

⁴² Graça Filho, Pinto, Malaquias 2007.

⁴³ Paiva 1995.

A tendency existed to mix different cultural heritages, as well as to resist this hybridization.⁴⁴

1.3 African Identities in Colonial Brazil

There is currently a profound discussion about African identities in Brazilian slave society with various scholars taking up the theme. Recent Brazilian historiography can be criticized, however, for two shortcomings. Firstly, there is very little attention paid to how identities were formed in precolonial Africa and how this was reflected in processes of identity formation in Brazil. Secondly, there is very little comparison to other New World colonies to which Africans were forcibly transported and where they faced the same basic question as slaves in any society; namely, how to achieve any meaning in life after the dehumanizing experience of violent enslavement. As will be suggested in this work, the solution was both communal and spiritual.

Identity is a concept that has been used in divergent contexts and with differing meanings. In this study, usage of the concept of identity primarily refers to collective rather than the personal identities of Central Africans.⁴⁵ In Chapter 4, the manifestations of collective Central African identities in Minas Gerais are scrutinized in detail. These collective identities, as represented in Brazil, were usually based on a shared sense of origin, homeland, or place of birth. The terms of origin used most commonly among the Central African slave population were Angola, Congo, and Benguela. These identifiers could reflect either the coastal ports, where the Atlantic crossing commenced, as in the case of Angola referring to Luanda, or the “city of Angola” as many slaves called it, and Benguela. However, all of these terms could also refer to larger regional entities. Deciphering the meaning of these labels clarifies the emergence of the collective identities of Central Africans in Minas Gerais.

A distinct aspect of collective identity, namely the formation of cultural identities, is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 of this study as the focus turns to religious practices and values. As Stuart Hall has argued, cultural identities are never static but, on the contrary, they are in a state of constant transformation and redefinition.⁴⁶ This was clearly the case among over 10 million slaves who

⁴⁴ Paiva 2001.

⁴⁵ On personal/collective divide, see Straub 2002.

⁴⁶ Hall 1990, p. 225, has argued that “[c]ultural identity [...] is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power.” See also, Hall 1996.

disembarked in the Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, and among the almost 4.9 million enslaved Africans who arrived in Brazil. Many of them were free citizens in their home communities that offered them a sense of belonging to a network of kinship relations, to a religious community, to a community of people speaking the same language and, sometimes, to a larger political entity as subjects. Through the process of enslavement, this sense of belonging was transformed and redefined as individuals were first put into the holds of the ships that transported them to the Americas, and then had to bear whatever experiences their position as subordinated slaves held in store for them.

The collective identities of Africans in the New World have often been treated from the perspective of ethnicity, an approach especially advocated by Paul Lovejoy and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall.⁴⁷ Lovejoy has effectively argued that ethnicity was a factor in the identity of the enslaved: “On the one hand, ethnicity meant something to the people themselves, evolving as it did out of language and perceptions of cultural similarities, but on the other hand the slave routes forced identifications onto people, who had to communicate to survive.”⁴⁸ Still, Lovejoy does not suggest that ethnic groups and markers of identity are in some way static, but are subject to change over time.⁴⁹

Ethnic identities are always formulated within a group, in relation to other groups.⁵⁰ This was true in Africa, where wide-ranging regional political entities formed slowly and whose influence at the village level was often superficial. However, in this study the concept of ethnicity is used cautiously as its meaning in precolonial Africa is far from clear.⁵¹ Instead, the terms “nation” (*nação*) and “place of birth” (*naturalidade*) that were used in the original documentation of the eighteenth century will be used. The first of these terms, “nation” was used by the Portuguese both in Africa and Brazil to refer to groups of people that clearly shared a collective identity. The term is placed in quotation marks to make a distinction from the modern use of the term, which usually refers to a group of people living in a nation state. Place of birth is used where applicable, when the documentation makes absolutely clear that being born in a certain place (Portuguese expression *natural de*) clearly gave a person a sense of collective identity with others who were born in the same location or area. The central question concerning identity is this: How much of the pre-Middle Passage identity was retained by Africans in the New World slave communities?

⁴⁷ Lovejoy 2003a, 2008; Hall 2005.

⁴⁸ Lovejoy 2003a, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Lovejoy 2003b and 2008.

⁵⁰ Barth 1998 [1969].

⁵¹ Thornton 2010.

Historians of Brazilian slavery have sought to answer this question by examining four separate social phenomena.⁵² Slave revolts or uprisings constitute one area of inquiry, with the best-known dating from the nineteenth century when the Atlantic slave trade was already dwindling and Africans were arriving in smaller numbers. Slave resistance and the formation of *quilombos*, or runaway communities, is a related topic that has been studied for the earlier centuries, but the sources on African identities within these communities are limited.⁵³ Slave marriages are the second theme that has been increasingly studied, and historians have sought to detect whether Africans were endogamous within their provenance group or if they tended to marry outside the group. It has to be remembered that, officially, marriage was a Catholic institution and the sources on this theme are the parish records; however, certainly there were also relationships that were never recorded in marriage registers, with the majority of the relationships between Africans perhaps of an informal nature.⁵⁴ The third theme is also related to a Catholic sacrament, namely baptism and the institution of godparenthood.⁵⁵ Catholic brotherhoods are the fourth area where historians have examined the formation of slave identities and ethnic alliances.⁵⁶

When naming slaves, the prevalent practice in colonial Brazil was to combine a Christian first name with names of African kingdoms, geographical regions, or ports of embarkation. The latter was designated as the individual's "nation" (*nação*). The names were given to slaves by their owners or by the Catholic Fathers who baptized them. Oliveira, who has studied the African communities in Bahia, has pointed out that the "nations" categorizing their new identity were largely attributed to Africans by outsiders, including ship captains and slave owners. These nations did not maintain, either in their name or in their social composition, a correlation with forms of identification that were prevalent in Africa. However, in the process of organizing their communities, Africans assumed the "nationalities" attributed to them as real ethnonyms. The "nations" formed their own identities by creating rules and by defining the limits of inclusion and exclusion. Oliveira gives the "nation" of the Nagôs as an example of identity formation in Bahia. Although slaves pertaining to this group accepted the new ethnonym, within the "nation" they still continued to distinguish members by referring to their precise ethnic origin or political

⁵² Faria 2007.

⁵³ On slave resistance and manifestations of African identities, see Guimarães 1988; Reis 1993; Soares 2001; and Gomes 2005.

⁵⁴ Slave families and African identities have been examined by e.g. Florentino and Goes 1997; Slenes 1999.

⁵⁵ Schwartz 1992, chapter 5 (Opening the Family Circle: Godparenthood in Brazilian Slavery); and Maia 2007.

⁵⁶ Reis 1997; Soares 2000; Borges 2005; Kiddy 2005a; and Pinheiro 2006.

identity in Africa, e.g. the Ijexás, the Ijebus, those from Oyo etc. However, many of the identities that had more limited use in Africa and were not heavily involved in the Atlantic slave trade were barely recognized in the Brazilian context, while some disappeared altogether.⁵⁷

Rio de Janeiro was another urban environment where the processes of identity formation and community organization among Africans were similarly limited by colonial society, but where slaves still succeeded in creating their own social networks. Soares has analyzed African identities in eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro by paying special attention to individuals of the “Mina nation”. Soares refers to the “Mina nation” and other similar designations in Brazil as provenance groups, meaning that these group identities united individuals of various ethnic groups. In some cases, “nations”, ethnic groups, kingdoms, villages, regions, and linguistic groups coincided, while in others they did not. Soares has shown that these classificatory systems operated between Africans as well as in other colonial contexts. However, she contends that social classification referring to the groups and locations experienced by Africans before their enslavement cannot lead to an illusion that they reproduced a form of African political or territorial organization in Brazil. Still, Soares implies that the nomenclature employed in eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro evoked a lived and represented past, and led to a reelaboration of a new ethnic identity in which ethnicity was defined by the place from where each individual marked his or her provenance. As numerous testaments of freed Africans show, years of living under slavery as baptized Christians did not erase the memory of their homelands and the new identities created in Brazil. Africans still continued to participate in their religious practices, labeled as “pagan and superstitious”, whether baptized or not. But curiously, as Soares points out, this new ethnic identity was not transmitted to the descendants of slaves. There were no Minas or Angolas born in Brazil. The “nation” was associated to the notion of “land” (*terra*) and, consequently, to slavery and the Atlantic slave trade.⁵⁸ This, however, does not automatically mean that the memory and meaning of their parents’ original African homeland was lost to Brazilian-born descendants of African slaves.

According to Karasch, “my land and my nation” were the favorite expressions of enslaved Africans living in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro. Africans appropriated the Portuguese expression “*nação*” (nation) and the identity that they were given by slave traders and slave owners, although these

⁵⁷ Oliveira 1992; idem. 1995/96, pp. 175-177. Oliveira has analyzed how the processes of identification were reflected in the formation of families among the slaves and freed Africans, in the godparenthood relationships, in choosing places of residence, and when freed Africans chose to buy slaves of the same nation. Reis 1993 has shown how ethnic antagonism affected the revolt of Africans in 1835 in Bahia.

⁵⁸ Soares 2004, pp. 319-320. See also, idem. 1998 and 2000.

were expressions used by outsiders. The use of specific terms to denote an individual's origin was rare. The new identity or "nation" assumed by Africans in Brazil often made reference to the port or region where they had embarked on the Middle Passage. However, this assumed identity became the major organizing principle for African slaves in Rio de Janeiro in the nineteenth century, with the great majority originating in West Central Africa.⁵⁹

While Brazilian scholars have often emphasized that enslaved Africans lost their ethnic identities and created new identities based on "nations" that were first given to them by outsiders, other historians of the African Diaspora in the Americas have argued that ethnic identity in the modern sense had not yet fully emerged in the era of the Atlantic slave trade. As Lovejoy has argued, the false assumption has often been that ethnic groups are static, and this has led historians to search for the names of modern ethnic groups in historical documents.⁶⁰ When these have not been found, they have concluded that Africans were in a disadvantageous position in relation to their masters and did not participate in the negotiation of the identities they were given by their owners. This being the case, they assumed the identities and adopted the "nations" that were used by whites to denote Africans originating in different regions. However, as shown by research from other parts of the New World, identity formation in the Americas was not that simple.

Russell Lohse, who studied Africans in colonial Costa Rica, has argued that, in their home societies, enslaved Africans "did not call or consider themselves members of a particular 'ethnic group,' but people tied to specific lineages, religious practices, customs, and homelands." Lohse employs the concepts of external and internal ethnicity to demonstrate how identities were formed. In Costa Rica, as in other New World colonies, external ethnicity was attributed to Africans from a huge geographical area by outsiders, who took perceived fundamental similarities and differences as the basis for the division of Africans into *castas*, or "national" groups. For Africans, according to Lohse, internal ethnicities or self-identification and self-naming "emerged from the specific historical processes that brought diverse African peoples together in the era of the slave trade."⁶¹

In Africa, people's self-identification was usually not connected to linguistically defined units. Thornton has argued that language was not the normal source of identity for Africans during the centuries of the slave trade. Instead, identities were based on political loyalties and geographical areas although in some regions, for example in Central Africa, linguistic identity could become important. According to Thornton, the idea of an ethno-linguistic

⁵⁹ Karasch 1987, pp. 3-4; idem., 1999, pp. 127-131.

⁶⁰ Lovejoy 2008, pp. 86-88.

⁶¹ Lohse 2005, p. 54.

based tribal identity is a creation of twentieth-century colonialism and not a deep rooted feature of African identity.⁶² This implies that the search for African ethnonyms in American sources is sometimes futile. Certainly ethnonyms have been found, as various studies show,⁶³ but these almost always refer to the historical realities of the late-eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries and were rarely recorded in earlier sources.

Though linguistically defined identity was not a primary concern for Africans in Africa, it was all the more important for enslaved Africans in the Americas. As Thornton has shown, it was natural for transplanted people to choose language as the first marker of identity. Language became the common ground for communication, above location or political loyalty, for a community that was no longer geographically fixed and was not constructed by political systems whose subjects had become separated from their rulers. According to Thornton, the origins of American identity began with the immediate end of any loyalty to the African polity or village from which they came. The formation of African “nations” in the Americas provided a mechanism for greeting and supporting newly arrived slaves who had been separated from their families, friends, or political connections and forced to cross the ocean to arrive in a harsh and confusing environment.⁶⁴

Examining the origins of African slaves in the North American context, Michael Gomez has similarly cautioned against the uncritical use of ethnic categorization because certain ethnic labels were artifacts of the slave trade and also because colonialist ideology played a role in defining particular ethnicities. According to Gomez, African social formations were enormously complex with a significant number not conforming to notions of ethnicity. Instead, people extended their conscious loyalties to a village, village group, or a town. Many of the relatively small-scale group identities were based on family or kin. Ethnicity and ethnic identities, where they existed, were formed and facilitated by some combination of centralized states, extensive commercial networks, religion, language, and culture. For example, Arabic sources show that ethnicity can be detected in West Africa long before people were exported via the transatlantic slave trade.⁶⁵

The search for African identities in the Americas therefore has to begin on the African continent. As Smallwood has argued, “we cannot adequately frame questions about who Africans became in diaspora without first asking who they understood themselves to be before falling victim to Atlantic dispersal.

⁶² Thornton 2000, pp. 242-244.

⁶³ See the Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy online database compiled by Gwendolyn Midlo-Hall, <http://www.ibiblio.org/laslave/index.html> Karasch 1987, pp. 371-383, Appendix A, lists ethnonyms recorded in Rio de Janeiro in 1830-1852.

⁶⁴ Thornton 2000, pp. 253-254.

⁶⁵ Gomez 1998, pp. 6-7.

Definitive answers to these questions, of course, are not possible in the absence of captives' own representations of self and community."⁶⁶ The colonial view that Africans were born into "tribes" has been effectively critiqued in the Africanist debate on the roots of ethnicity in Africa.⁶⁷ However, the antithesis, that ethnicity was invented by European colonial administrators, missionaries, and ethnographers, does not find much favor among historians today. As Nugent has recently argued, the boundaries of self-identification in Africa have mutated constantly in line with the shifting configurations of space and power.⁶⁸ This can also be observed in the case of various Central African identities. Thus, rather than seeking "essential" or "pure" African ethnic identities in Brazil and in other New World destinations for enslaved Africans, historians should seek to delineate how African identities were transformed by the experiences of enslavement and the Atlantic crossing, and how they continued to be negotiated in the various slave societies in the Americas.⁶⁹

1.4 Creolization and Syncretism in the Southern Atlantic

In order to better understand the institution of slavery in the Americas, many scholars have deemed it necessary to begin their research in Africa. Thornton has been a strong advocate of this approach, and although his approach is not completely new, methodologically it departs from earlier attempts to discern African backgrounds of the slaves by calling for detailed research of historical documents. Thornton has criticized specialists of the history of the Americas for not fully grasping the dynamic of precolonial African societies, because "they have studied African culture through the medium of modern anthropology rather than the careful study of contemporary documents," which has led to statements that have been based on the theoretical supposition that African societies and cultures did not change.⁷⁰

Following these methodological guidelines, West Central Africa has been taken as the starting point for this study. Rather than seeing this region as an isolated backwater, cut off from human development, it should be treated as a crossroads, mediating contact with a wide range of peoples and cultures. This resulted in the emergence of contact societies where Africans met, absorbed, and engaged with others from outside the continent. In Central Africa,

⁶⁶ Smallwood 2007, p. 102.

⁶⁷ Terence Ranger's contribution to *The Invention of Tradition* stands as a landmark of these debates. See Ranger 1983.

⁶⁸ Nugent 2008, p. 922.

⁶⁹ Lovejoy 2008, pp. 87-90.

⁷⁰ Thornton 1998a, p. 6. On the issue of methodology of studying the African Diaspora, see also Palmer 1998; Zeleza 2005.

societies that were involved in trade developed distinctive characteristics as a result of this encounter. Heywood has argued that by the beginning of the eighteenth century, a Creole culture had emerged in Portuguese Angola and was undergoing significant transformation. She has pointed out that on the one hand this phenomenon occurred as a result of the Africanization of Portuguese settlers and their culture, while on the other, Central Africans were adept at selectively integrating elements of European culture into their own cultural fabric.⁷¹ Taking this analysis further, Heywood and Thornton have argued that the Atlantic Creole culture spread in concentric circles from Luanda into the interior of Angola with the Portuguese conquest in the seventeenth century.⁷² As a result of the Atlantic slave trade, slaves brought elements of this culture with them to the plantations, mines, and urban centers of Brazil.⁷³

Angola was certainly not the only area of Atlantic Africa where the arrival of European traders and missionaries led to the emergence of contact societies and cultural creolization. Similar cultural processes can be detected in Senegambia, the Gold Coast, and the Bights of Benin and Biafra. However, as Ferreira has noted, creolization was not as intense in any of these regions as it was in Angola during the slave trade era. Contrasting with other regions, Angolan creolization spread into the interior as well.⁷⁴ However, Sweet has questioned the extent of creolization in Angola and the kingdom of Kongo on the grounds that many Central Africans continued to live according to traditional cultural values, especially in the sphere of religion.⁷⁵

Although the concept of creolization has been used increasingly in recent years by historians of the Atlantic world, there is often confusion of what the term means in various studies. The term itself was coined in the early colonial period to denote the offspring of Old World progenitors born and raised in the Americas. In scholarship, starting with linguistics, it came to be applied to mixed languages that emerged when pidgins (contact languages facilitating trade between Europeans and locals) were learned as mother tongues by subsequent generations.⁷⁶ Trying to understand the cultural context out of which Creole societies grew in the Caribbean, Brathwaite analyzed the Jamaican slave society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Brathwaite's analysis suggested that two separate traditions emerged in Jamaica. He argued that

⁷¹ Heywood 2002.

⁷² Heywood and Thornton 2007a, especially maps on pp. 227-235.

⁷³ Heywood 1999.

⁷⁴ Ferreira 2006.

⁷⁵ Sweet 2003.

⁷⁶ Baker and Mühlhäusler 2007.

“within the dehumanizing institution of slavery [...] were two cultures of people, having to adapt themselves to a new environment. The friction created by this confrontation was cruel, but it was also creative. The white plantations and social institution [...] reflect one aspect of this. The slaves’ adaptation of their African cultures to a new world reflects another.”⁷⁷

Brathwaite’s analysis moved the term Creole from its linguistic usage to a concept that has since been increasingly used to analyze cultural phenomena that have developed out of contact situations between the representatives of different cultures. For the Atlantic world, Berlin has argued that, beginning in the sixteenth century, a new culture emerged along the Atlantic littoral in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Berlin designates the people who by experience or choice became part of this new culture as Atlantic Creoles. Thus, birth in the Americas was not always essential for a person to adopt an Atlantic Creole identity. Berlin has contended that “‘African’ and ‘Creole’ were as much a matter of choice as of birth. The term ‘Atlantic Creole’ is designed to capture the cultural transformation that sometimes preceded generational change and sometimes was unaffected by it.”⁷⁸ In effect, Heywood and Thornton have adopted Atlantic Creole, as defined by Berlin, as an analytical tool to explain the process of creolization that took place in Central Africa in the seventeenth century, and in the New World as Central African Atlantic Creoles were taken over the ocean as slaves.⁷⁹

In cultural analysis, creolization implies mixture and it can be equated with concepts such as transculturation and hybridization. In the context of Brazilian historiography, however, the Portuguese term that is used in the literature is *mestiçagem* or miscegenation.⁸⁰ In Brazilian slave society, the term *crioulo/a* signified a Brazilian-born slave as opposed to a slave born in Africa. The use of these terms implied varying degrees of acculturation, high in the case of *crioulos/as* and low in the case of *boçals*, or recently arrived Africans. Thus, in Brazil the term *crioulização*, which translates into creolization, implies a process whereby the number of Brazilian-born slaves increased in relation to slaves brought from Africa.⁸¹ For clarity, the Portuguese term *crioulo/a* will be used in this study to refer to Brazilian-born slaves. Otherwise, the term Atlantic Creole will be employed in the sense that it has been used by Heywood and

⁷⁷ Brathwaite 1971, p. 306.

⁷⁸ Berlin 1996, p. 254.

⁷⁹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a.

⁸⁰ In Minas Gerais, the processes of cultural creolization in the eighteenth century or *mestiçagem* has been analyzed extensively by Paiva 2001, 2002, and his students Netto 2008 and Almeida 2010. All these studies embrace the notion of *mestiçagem* in the sense of racial mixing as well.

⁸¹ Pares 2005.

Thornton to signify cultural creolization in Central Africa as well as individuals who were living in and affected by this cultural environment. As Heywood's and Thornton's studies implicitly suggest, there were different degrees of creolization which varied in time and space.

Another concept that is closely related to creolization, and sometimes used as its synonym, is syncretism. In this study, the term syncretism is used especially in Chapters 5 and 6, which discuss religious encounters in West Central Africa and Minas Gerais. The term is used in its broadest and most general sense to refer to a combination of elements from two or more different religious traditions,⁸² in this case indigenous Central African religious practices and Roman Catholicism which was imported to Central Africa and Brazil by the Portuguese. Thus, creolization will be used when referring to cultural mixture in language, cuisine, naming practices, music, and dress, whereas syncretism will be employed when discussing religious mixture.

The discussion regarding the impact of the different African backgrounds of slaves in the Americas has often focused on "survivals" or "Africanisms". Brazilian interpretations of African "survivals" were discussed in the pioneering works of Nina Rodrigues, Manuel Querino, Artur Ramos, and especially by Gilberto Freyre in *Casa-grande e Senzala*. In the Anglophone research, the debate began with the publication of Melville Herskovits' influential study *The Myth of the Negro Past* in 1941.⁸³ The so-called Mintz-Price thesis, expounded originally by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in 1976, has been highly influential in recent discussion on "survivals". They argued that slaves were not able to transfer their traditional African cultures and institutions to the New World, but in the early stages of colonization of the Americas the Africans forged a new, entirely creolized slave-culture. Mintz and Price claimed that this new "cultural system" was even stronger than the ties provided by the bonds of ethnic origin, and that the new African-American culture and its concomitant social ties were primary, even in situations in which members of a particular ethnic or linguistic group could remain in close contact.⁸⁴

James Sweet has put forward a strong argument that neither the study of "survivals" nor the argument about entirely new creolized slave societies is sufficient. The Mintz-Price thesis tends to show little consideration for specific elements from the African past, whereas in the study of "survivals" Africa has often been seen as static and homogenized. Instead, Sweet has argued that the cultural and religious values of specific African peoples were transferred to the Americas. His argument is validated by new studies on the slave trade that

⁸² See Stewart 1999.

⁸³ Rodrigues 1932, Querino 1938, Ramos 1937, Freyre 1933, Herskovits 1941. "Survivals" are also studied in e.g. Bastide 1971, and Holloway, ed., 1990.

⁸⁴ Mintz and Price 1992, pp. 18-19, 47. For a critique, see Hall 2005, pp. 49-50, 168-169.

demonstrate that many Africans were arriving in the Americas in coherent cultural groupings, which shared language, kinship, religion, and much else in common. Sweet has argued that when significant creolization occurred among Africans in Brazil, the exchanges were most salient between Africans of different regional origins, and not between Africans and Portuguese.⁸⁵

Sweet has studied colonial Brazilian society, but his research has mainly focused on the coastal areas. It is possible to test Sweet's arguments by studying Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. The assumption is that among the slave population in Minas Gerais similar processes can be found that show how African culture was not surviving but arriving in Brazil. However, at the same time it is necessary to take into account the processes of creolization and syncretism that were already underway in West Central Africa. While arguing for a higher degree of creolization than suggested by Sweet, this study will not go as far as Mintz and Price in claiming that, in the Americas, a "new cultural system" replaced the values that arrived with slaves from Africa – if that were the case, it would be pointless to discuss slave origins in the first place.

The society and people of eighteenth-century Minas Gerais have often been characterized as highly religious, and numerous studies have been devoted to the Baroque architecture and culture of the area. Religious brotherhoods had an important place on the spread and interpretation of Catholicism, especially among the African sectors of the population.⁸⁶ However, *mineiro* society should not be studied solely through the lens of Christianity, because popular religiosity was manifested in various ways.

The religious life of Africans in Brazil is a theme that has been widely covered in the research literature. Laura de Mello e Souza's pioneering study of popular religion in colonial Brazil brought to light many uncovered aspects of daily life in the colony. Her study touched upon African religious practices, although they did not form the core of the research. Souza pointed to the prevalence of African magic practices generally termed *calundus* in Minas Gerais during the eighteenth century. However, she was not particularly interested in the African background of these practices, but argued that these were syncretistic manifestations of popular religiosity that were born out of the Africans' need to survive in a slave society. Thus, in Souza's view, Africans were not recreating an African world in Brazil, as Sweet has argued, but instead were creating a new syncretistic religious culture that was influenced more by the new surroundings than by ancestral traditions.⁸⁷ A closer reading of some of the source material employed by Souza reveals much more about these practices,

⁸⁵ Sweet 2003, pp. 115-116.

⁸⁶ Scarano 1976; Boschi 1986; Kiddy 2005a; Borges 2005.

⁸⁷ Souza 1986. João José Reis 1988 has criticized Souza's work on the grounds that she did not pay as much attention to African ethnic religions as she did to European popular religiosity. Souza 2005 retains her earlier position.

and they cannot all be dismissed as simple syncretism or adaptations. In practice some modifications were certainly necessary, but with the continuous arrival of increasing numbers of Africans in Brazil during the eighteenth century, it can be argued that African cultural practices in Brazil were constantly reinforced.

People's private religion was manifested in colonial Brazil in various ways. Luiz Mott has shown that far from being a colony where Catholicism was the norm there were actually many different attitudes to Catholic religion, from authentic practicing Catholics to pseudo Catholics who only complied with Church rituals to avoid repression by the Inquisition. This last group included "New Christians" and atheists, as well as Africans and Amerindians who chose to maintain their indigenous practices.⁸⁸ In another important contribution Mott has concentrated on a Central African healer-diviner who was engaged in suspect religious practices that were denounced to the officials of the Portuguese Inquisition. His article on Luzia Pinta, a woman originally from Luanda but at the time living in Sabará, who was denounced to Inquisition officials in 1739, shows how Africans could rely on their native practices even decades after their initial enslavement and arrival in Brazil.⁸⁹

Perhaps the most comprehensive work on African religiosity in Minas Gerais has been undertaken by André Nogueira, who relied mainly on documentation found in the ecclesiastical archive in Mariana. In his articles, Nogueira has considered how magic practices were tied to assumptions about health and healing and how African healers often used the same sorts of remedies and cures that were employed by the "official" and educated surgeons. The main dividing line between African healers and white doctors was that Africans also used spirit possession rituals to determine the "cause" of the illness. Besides healing, Africans were often accused of causing physical harm and financial losses to slave owners or their property by using witchcraft. Thus, there was clearly a notion that magic practices could be employed by Africans for both good ends and evil. In the same vein as Souza, Nogueira argues that these magic practices should be considered as being peculiar to *mineiro* society, and not as purely African forms of religious expression.⁹⁰

1.5 Sources and Methodology

Studying the presence and processes of identity formation of West Central Africans in Minas Gerais is a task that requires the use of many different types

⁸⁸ Mott 1997, pp. 175, 220.

⁸⁹ Mott 1994. The case of Luzia Pinta is also discussed in detail in Souza 1986, pp. 352-357; and Marcussi 2006 and 2009.

⁹⁰ Nogueira 2006, 2007a and 2007b. Nogueira (2005) has also published a case study about an Angolan healer who was subjected to a civil trial in Vila Rica (Ouro Preto) in 1791.

of sources. Qualitative sources have mainly been analyzed, while other sources employed, such as testaments, contain both qualitative and quantitative data. None of these sources were written by Central Africans, who are the subject of this study. In a few cases, Central Africans were interviewed by ecclesiastics, which is as close as it is possible to get to actually hearing the voice of the people who are the object of this study. Where testaments were concerned, because they were dictated, the voice of Africans is heard as well. But even testaments are highly formulaic and follow European and Catholic norms. Most sources that have been analyzed depict Africans in a negative light. To slave owners, and the white population in general, Africans were inferior subjects who had to be controlled and numerous laws were passed in colonial Brazil for the sole purpose of controlling the black population. Similarly, this aspect of control was part of the function of the Catholic Church. The official Church was concerned with bringing the practitioners of all sorts of heterodoxies back into the Christian fold. Thus, people were questioned about all sorts of suspicious practices for which the guilty were punished, resulting in a significant paper trail.

The source material concerning the background of African slaves exported to Brazil is mainly located in Lisbon and Luanda, but substantial records can also be found in Brazil and Italy, as well as in numerous archives in Portugal. The bulk of the material involving Angola and Brazil is located in the Portuguese overseas archive, the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* (AHU) in Lisbon, where documentation produced by Portuguese authorities and bureaucrats in their colonies is stored. It is possible to find valuable information on the local peoples and cultures that Portuguese colonists encountered in, and also forcefully transported from, their colonies in Africa. Among the documents available are military letters, exploration plans and reports, commercial records, as well as hospital records, censuses, descriptions of indigenous customs and cultural habits, and reports on conflicts between the Portuguese and the local authorities.

For the most part, however, this material frustratingly lacks information on African cultural practices, traditions, and customs. Isabel Castro Henriques has pointed out that there were two obstacles to observing and reporting from Angola: European colonists were limited by their own preconceived ideas and biases towards African cultures, and Africans controlled what was shown to European visitors, hiding and obscuring many ritual practices, and even daily life.⁹¹ Only in the context of cultural repression, when Portuguese colonists sought

⁹¹ Henriques 2000, p. 35. In Kongo, during conflicts with Portuguese authorities, the rulers rarely spoke to foreigners, and people were generally reluctant to communicate with foreign visitors. This led one friar to comment that “these people do not want anyone to understand them, and as they refrain from communicating their secrets to us, we are unable to decipher them.” See Hilton, 1985, p. 134.

to suppress African cultural practices, can more detailed descriptions of local customs, such as funeral ceremonies in Luanda or Angolan fashion in Brazil, be read. In Luanda, repressive measures, or at least the rhetoric condemning Angolan customs, were especially rife in the middle of the eighteenth century during the governorship of Dom Francisco Inocencio de Sousa Coutinho, and these should be looked at in the wider context of the Pombaline reforms that aimed to make Portuguese authority overseas more efficient.⁹²

In addition to the AHU, extensive material can be found in the Portuguese national archive, the *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* (ANTT), with the collections of the *Tribunal do Santo Ofício da Inquisição*, the Portuguese Inquisition, focusing on cultural and religious issues. The Inquisition's documents have been used increasingly in recent years by historians of colonial Brazil and precolonial Africa, although the scope of the material is daunting. As is now attested by several studies, they are highly relevant for Africanists and students of the African Diaspora in the Portuguese speaking world.⁹³ The research for this study was facilitated by the online database that now makes it possible to search for traces of Africans and their descendants in more than 17,000 *processos*, or trials, which were processed by the prosecutors of the Lisbon Inquisition.⁹⁴

Especially in the early phases during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the Inquisition was especially concerned with prosecuting Portuguese "New Christians" (*cristaõs-novos*). Trials began when the Inquisitors received denunciations that were deemed serious enough to require further investigation. What followed was usually an order to the local priests to obtain more evidence against the accused by questioning witnesses who might know something about the alleged crime. That could lead to further examination, which meant the accused being taken to the Inquisition's jail in Lisbon, being interrogated and finally, if found guilty, condemned. The *processos* could sometimes take years to complete and, in some cases, the accused died in jail before a verdict was reached. There are some well-known cases from eighteenth-century Angola and Minas Gerais in which the accused were actually brought to trial in Lisbon. The case from Angola concerns João de Pereira da Cunha, the captain-major of Ambaca, and his Angolan concubine Catarina Juliana. These related trials contain a great amount of information about Angolan society in

⁹² Machado 1998.

⁹³ Calainho 2001, 2004 and 2008; Havik 2009; Horta 1997; Mott 1988, 1994 and 2005; Pantoja 2004; Sweet 2003 and 2011; Thornton 1998a; Walker 2004.

⁹⁴ The Portuguese Inquisition was divided into the three tribunals of Lisbon, Coimbra, and Évora. The number of cases of the three tribunals combined exceeds 40,000, but cases concerning Central Africans in Angola and Brazil were processed by the Lisbon tribunal. On the organizing principles of the Portuguese Inquisition, see Amiel 1986.

the mid-eighteenth century, and will be referred to throughout this study.⁹⁵ The famous case of the Central African healer-diviner Luzia Pinta is another instance in which the accused was actually imprisoned and taken to Lisbon from Minas Gerais for questioning.⁹⁶

The *processos* are the richest source of information to be found among the Inquisition's documents.⁹⁷ Starting with the denunciations, there are descriptions of practices that were deemed suspicious by the more devout Catholics, which include blasphemy, bigamy, and sorcery. Some cases never proceeded further than denunciation, and although some are referred to as *processos* in the documentation they in fact include only the letter of denunciation. In some problematic cases, the denunciations reflected local rivalries, because the Inquisition offered a solution for the jealous to rid themselves of a wealthier neighbor, to settle old resentments, or for the whole community to simply remove unwanted members. Prosecutors not only interrogated suspects on the nature of their heresy but were especially eager to investigate whether the accused had made a pact with the Devil. Here the Inquisition *processos* are again problematic in respect of Africans who did not view the world as being divided between heaven and hell, and with some people simply confessing to the Inquisitors' accusations to receive an early sentence rather than languishing in jail for years. Despite these drawbacks the *processos* offer valuable information on religious and social life in Portugal, as well as in Africa and Brazil. They offer important glimpses of the daily lives of people and the cultural universe in the colonies, and are thus invaluable sources for research.

Another important collection of Inquisition sources are the books of the prosecutor, *Cadernos do Promotor*, which include letters of denunciation from Portugal and its colonial outposts that did not lead to a trial. These books reveal the full extent of religious practices deemed to be heterodox, and also clues as to why the Inquisition eventually failed to bring all the "lost sheep" back into the fold. The *Cadernos do Promotor*, altogether numbering 144 bound books,⁹⁸ all include several hundred pages of denunciations regarding individuals suspected of suspicious practices. These denunciations came from all over Portugal and its colonial possessions, including West Central Africa and Minas Gerais. The *Cadernos do Promotor* are not as rich in description as

⁹⁵ The interrelated processos are ANTT, TSO/IL, *processos* 5067 (Sumário dos exames aos escravos do sargento-mor João Pereira da Cunha, governador do presídio de Ambaca), 6948 (Processo de Catarina Juliana), 9691 (Processo de João Pereira da Cunha), 10120 (Processo de João Pedro Macolo), 13836 (Correspondência de Catarina Juliana), 14148 (Correspondência de Filipe Dias Chaves). For a detailed analysis of these cases, see Kananoja 2010.

⁹⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 252.

⁹⁷ When I began my research in Lisbon in 2007, only a very small fragment of the *processos* was digitized. As of 2011, all the *processos* and *cadernos do promotor* are available in digital format through the portal <http://digitarq.dgarq.gov.pt/>

⁹⁸ Including the books marked "Papéis de Fora" or "Papéis Antigos".

the *processos*, and it is impossible to check on the reliability of the information from a single denunciation of a suspected practice. However, in some cases the denunciations include the testimonies of several witnesses concerning a particular case. Furthermore, the reliability of the information can be checked by comparing the denunciations with other sources. Often the denunciations included in the *Cadernos* describe similar cases that are found in the *processos*. The reason for these denunciations not leading to a trial can partly be explained by the lack of Inquisitorial resources – there were simply so many people accused that bringing them to Lisbon from all over the world and keeping them in jail for years would have been a costly undertaking. The Portuguese Inquisition also began to lose its influence after the Marquis of Pombal came to power in 1750 and started to reform Portuguese society after the Lisbon earthquake of 1755. This study has tried to follow the example set by Carlo Ginzburg and research all Inquisitorial material through anthropological lenses. But as Ginzburg has pointed out, the Inquisition’s documents are always insufficient sources because an historian would pose questions to the accused and the witnesses not originally thought of by the prosecutors.⁹⁹

In Minas Gerais, ecclesiastical documents that can be compared to the Inquisition sources both in scope and purpose are housed in the *Arquivo Eclesiástico da Arquidiocese de Mariana* (AEAM). These are the 50 books that contain the *devassas eclesiásticas*, or the proceedings of the so-called “Little Inquisition”.¹⁰⁰ The ecclesiastical visits to different villages in Minas Gerais during the eighteenth century were regulated by the *Constituições Primeiras* of the archbishopric of Bahia, published in 1707. The *Constituições* defined the practices that were deemed condemnable and how the *devassas* should proceed in practice.¹⁰¹ The incessant visits were made personally by the bishop or by priests that they sent to different parishes. According to Figueiredo, the geographic scale, their regularity, and the forceful application of punishments made such visits one of the principal instruments of religious politics in colonial Minas Gerais.¹⁰²

The books of *devassas* can be divided to two groups. First are the books of testimonies, *termos de testemunha*, which were compiled during the first visit of ecclesiastical officers to a certain parish. The purpose of this visit was to question witnesses about individuals who were engaged in suspicious practices. As regulated by the *Constituições Primeiras*, a list of 40 offending practices was first read to those being interrogated, who were then asked whether they had seen or heard of anyone engaged in such activities. Many individuals simply

⁹⁹ Ginzburg 1996, pp. 101-102, 181.

¹⁰⁰ The term “*a pequena inquisição*” is used by Figueiredo and Sousa 1987, and Figueiredo 2007, to describe the ecclesiastical visits that took place in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais.

¹⁰¹ Vide 1719, livro V, título 39 (das Devassas).

¹⁰² Figueiredo 2007, p. 112.

chose to remain silent in front of the priests, while others eagerly denounced their neighbors, delinquent local priests, slaves, single women and men living in consensual unions, and so on. The curious thing about the *devassas* is that almost anyone's name could appear in the proceedings, regardless of their social standing in the community. Sometimes the witnesses named other individuals who would know more about certain suspicious persons. In this way, a *devassa* was conducted in a town or a village with the officials remaining for several days, or sometimes even several weeks. In the end, the evidence was evaluated and a list of culprits compiled. Some people were absolved from all charges due to lack of evidence, while the majority were given a punishment in the form of fines and/or admonishment. The most common accusation in the *devassas* concerned couples who were living together or having a relationship without concluding a Christian marriage.¹⁰³ This also included accusations against men who were in relationships with their slave women.¹⁰⁴

The second group of books consists of the *termos de culpa*, or books of the guilty. Sometime after the ecclesiastical officers' first visit, a second visit followed during which those who were deemed guilty of misconduct were called before the priests and admonished for their sins.¹⁰⁵ The guilty also had to promise to change their ways and to repent their deeds. Unlike the testimonies, these sentences contain little information on heterodox practices since the crime is usually mentioned in only a few words.

Taken together, the books of *devassas* clearly reveal the extent of African practices and beliefs that were maintained by slaves and freedmen in Minas Gerais. Based on the information contained in the *devassas*, it could be argued that every village had its own healer from Africa, either slave or free. However, the descriptions of these practices are not always very revealing. On many occasions the witnesses only mentioned in a general way that they had heard or seen a certain person engaged in "pagan" rituals. There were certainly white people who participated in African ceremonies, but when called to testify before the priests they probably did not want to reveal the full extent of their participation, because they would then have drawn suspicion upon themselves. They might have chosen to keep the identity of an African healer they knew secret for fear of the denounced healer working harmful magic against them.¹⁰⁶ The testimonies were further filtered by the scribes who wrote them down. They did not reproduce verbatim what was said by the witnesses but reformulated their testimonies to fit a general formula that compressed the information received.

¹⁰³ Luna and Costa 1982b; Figueiredo 1997; Cruz 2005 for figures from Comarca do Rio das Mortes.

¹⁰⁴ Rangel 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Figueiredo 2007, p. 120.

¹⁰⁶ The idea that popular healers with curing powers could also harm others through magic was widespread, expressed by Sprenger and Kramer in *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486. See Walker 2005, p. 17.

However, even with these drawbacks, the *devassas* are highly revealing on the cultural universe of Minas Gerais, and it is often possible to identify the Africans who, even in slavery, maintained their indigenous cultural practices.

The activities of the Portuguese Inquisition were quite marginal from the point of view of Africans in Minas Gerais, although the Inquisition did take repressive measures against many white people living in the captaincy during the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁷ The *devassas eclesiásticas* that were organized in the bishopric of Mariana reflect the workings of the local Catholic Church and its ways to locate and persecute people suspected of heterodox religious practices. These punitive mechanisms rarely met, but significantly, in the case of Luzia Pinta, they did meet, although this has not been discussed in the earlier studies concerning her. Luzia Pinta was denounced at least twice in the local ecclesiastical visits before denunciations against her landed on the desk of an Inquisition commissioner in 1739.¹⁰⁸

Although the *devassas* sometimes mention that Africans accused of witchcraft were jailed in a local prison cell by secular authorities,¹⁰⁹ the written records of such imprisonments have unfortunately been lost, if they ever existed. Only in Mariana, in the *Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Mariana*, have books been located that detail imprisonments in the local jail during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹¹⁰ Although there are no references to witchcraft in this document, other forms of slave resistance that led to imprisonment in Mariana, which involved slaves of the same *nação* cooperating in causing harm to their masters, have been noted. So far, records of the only civil trial against a Central African healer that have been located are housed in the archive of the *Casa do Pilar* in Ouro Preto, which detail the trial of an Angolan freedman named Caetano da Costa, also known as *Pai* (father) Caetano, in 1791.¹¹¹

Besides archival sources, this study makes use of published primary sources that mainly concern religious life in West Central Africa. All of them are well known among scholars of Central African history. The major manuscripts

¹⁰⁷ Fernandes 2000.

¹⁰⁸ In 1727 in Sabará, Manoel Ferreira da Cruz denounced Luzia Pinta, *negra forra*, for “consenting to dishonesty”. This expression might have indicated that Luzia Pinta was at this point already offering services as a healer-diviner, but it might also have meant that she was consenting, for example, to her slaves engaging themselves in prostitution. AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, 1727-1747, ff. 38v. In 1738, there is a clearer reference to Luzia’s activities as a popular healer. During an ecclesiastic visit, she was admonished for consenting to “*callandu*” ceremonies. AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, Z-1 1738, f. 72v.

¹⁰⁹ AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, 1727-1747, ff. 344; AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, Z-10, ff. 14, 28v, 48v, 52, 99v, 106; AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, Z-11, ff. 55, 61; AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, Z-12, ff. 33v-35v;

¹¹⁰ AHCMM, Códice 189, Livro de termos de prisão 1772-1787, and Códice 167, Livro de termos de prisão 1789-1841.

¹¹¹ Analyzed in Nogueira 2005.

dealing with the Portuguese conquest of Angola and the surrounding areas in the seventeenth century are Cavazzi's *Descrição Histórica dos Três Reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola* and Cadornega's *História Geral das Guerras Angolanas*. Both manuscripts have been published in modern editions with extensive annotation. The present study relies on the Portuguese translation of Cavazzi. Besides Cavazzi's work, there are other missionary accounts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many of which have been translated into French from the original Italian by Cuvelier and Jadin. Jadin has also translated and published archival sources from the Vatican.

Although the missionary accounts are valuable sources, great care must be taken in their interpretation. Generally, they reflect the collision of two differing religious world views and tend to misrepresent African religious values and ideas. Looking at Central African religious practices through a Catholic lens, the missionaries generally saw these foreign practices as the work of the Devil. Africans certainly did not worship the Devil, but a variety of deities and ancestral spirits that could be manifested in natural objects and sculptures. While Cavazzi was a Catholic Father and missionary and Cadornega was a layman, this did not affect their view of traditional religious life in Central African societies, looking at it through the cultural prism of Catholicism. The idea that traditional religious objects and practices represented the work of the Devil was only gradually adopted by Africans who had converted to Catholicism. They might, for example, confess before the Inquisitors that they had concluded a pact with the Devil, but such confessions should always be treated with great caution rather than taken at face value.

1.6 Outline of the Chapters

Because the scope of this research is twofold, moving between two continents and over a century in time, a thematic structure has been chosen. Chapter 2 introduces the main actors of this book, namely West Central Africans. Their interactions with each other will be highlighted, but also with the Portuguese colonizers, missionaries, and traders. Chapter 2 aims to outline the organization of the slave trade in the region, and will also look at the cultural life of Central Africans as they were drawn into the orbit of Atlantic Creole culture.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the demographic presence of Central Africans in the population of Minas Gerais, as far as it can possibly be quantified, and starts by examining the slave trade and how it served as a bridge between Africa and Brazil. Chapter 3 not only charts the flow of slaves to different ports in Brazil from Angola's two main slaving ports, Luanda and Benguela, but also from other parts of Africa during the eighteenth century, pointing to

shifts in exports from different regions of Africa and to differences between the main ports in Brazil, which were Rio de Janeiro and Salvador during the eighteenth century. Slaves from both of these ports were re-exported to Minas Gerais, again with shifting emphasis during the century. Chapter 3 also outlines the characteristics of slave life in Minas Gerais. Slavery as an institution was often dehumanizing and did not spare its victims, but arguing such general circumstances for eighteenth-century Minas Gerais would be oversimplifying the case because the region offered many opportunities for slaves to gain their freedom.

Chapter 4 examines the processes of identification in West Central Africa and in Minas Gerais. The three major groups that emerged as collective identities in Brazil, namely Angola, Congo, and Benguela, will be discussed with an interpretation of what these terms meant for the individuals pertaining to these groups. This interpretation departs from conventional wisdom in that it seeks to argue that these terms were more than simple labels put on their property by slave owners. Central Africans gave these terms their own significance that was to a great extent influenced by their shared experience of the Middle Passage. The processes of identity formation with regard to Central Africans were assisted by the mutually intelligible Bantu languages that eased communication between individuals originating in this region. By appropriating markers of identity, such as Angola, Congo, or Benguela, Africans created viable communities that gave a meaning to slave life through belonging to a larger group. Chapter 4 also looks at other smaller Central African nations that were present in *mineiro* society. The chapter concludes with a discussion on stereotypes of different African “nations”.

Chapter 5 discusses religious life in Central Africa by examining indigenous religious traditions, the spread of Catholicism in the region, and the resulting syncretism that came to characterize religious life in some cases. The different trajectories of the spread of Catholicism in the kingdom of Kongo and in the conquest of Angola are given special attention. The chapter also discusses what happened to the religious identity of Central Africans when they were taken to Minas Gerais. It will be argued that there were special characteristics of Central African religious life that were brought to Brazil. One of the most important characteristics was flexibility and openness to new religious ideas. While presenting a problem for the learned theologians of the Church, there was no conflict for Central Africans in mixing ideas from two religious traditions: one African, the other European.

Continuing the discussion of religious identity, Chapter 6 deals with healing and divination practices on both sides of the southern Atlantic. Leaning heavily on Inquisitorial sources it examines the role of religious specialists in Central African societies. How Central African therapeutic practices were viewed

by Portuguese physicians in eighteenth-century Angola and how these doctors sought to introduce new medical innovations into Angola will be discussed. Discerning the African background of healing and divination practices is instrumental in understanding the activities of Central African popular healers in Minas Gerais. By examining the ritual practices of individual healers and diviners, this study seeks to bring greater specificity to the discussion on the meanings of African origins in colonial Brazil and, most importantly, to give a voice to at least a few of the enslaved Africans, numbering over 10.5 million, who were forcibly taken to the Americas.

2 Central Africans and the Atlantic Slave Trade to Brazil

2.1 Measuring the Slave Trade to Brazil in the Eighteenth Century

Slaves arrived in Brazil from many different parts of Africa. Slave ships loaded their human cargo on the Atlantic African shoreline that extended from Senegambia through the Windward Coast and Gold Coast to the Bights of Benin and Biafra and to West Central Africa. In the eighteenth century, Indian Ocean ports in Southeast Africa were also included among the regions that sent slaves over the Southern Atlantic. These slaves came from widely varying cultural backgrounds and spoke numerous languages. While some areas were culturally and linguistically diverse, others were more homogenous. Studying the background of the African slaves who were exported from their homelands to Brazil is crucial to understanding African agency in colonial Brazil.

Using language as a criterion, Thornton has divided Atlantic Africa during the era of the slave trade into three culturally distinct zones, which he has further divided into seven subzones. The Upper Guinea cultural zone extended from the Senegal River down to the area just south of Cape Mount in modern Liberia. This was linguistically the most diverse region. Two completely different language families, the West Atlantic family and the Mande family, were represented in this zone. Despite linguistic differences, economic factors brought people culturally closer to each other. Mande commercial and political dominance led to frequent contacts between different language communities. Cultural sharing and multilingualism were widespread, and the Muslim faith connected many peoples of the region.

The second great zone was Lower Guinea which stretched from the lagoons of the western Ivory Coast over to Cameroon. Linguistically this second zone was more homogenous than the first, for all the people in the Lower Guinea region spoke languages of the Kwa family. However, the Kwa family is an ancient one with great differences between Akan speakers in the west and the Aja group (including Fon, Yoruba, Edo and Igbos) in the east. Cultural intercommunication within this zone was extensive, and good transportation networks forged close economic and cultural contacts.¹

¹ Thornton 1998a, pp. 186-190.

The third cultural zone was the Angola coast, or West Central Africa. Linguistically this region was much less diverse than the other major zones. All the people spoke languages of the Western Bantu subgroup, and only three languages, Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu, dominated among the slaves that were exported from this region. Even people brought from the linguistically more diverse interior could learn these languages without much instruction within a few weeks, and they had numerous items of vocabulary in common. Politically the Angolan zone was more diverse but from the point of view of ordinary people politics probably mattered little.²

The numbers of African slaves exported to the Americas have been studied by many generations of historians. The results of these studies are now stored in the new Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) which has been online since 2008. The TSTD enables researchers to search the Voyages Database that contains information on 34,948 documented voyages between 1514 and 1866. However, the documented voyages represent only about four-fifths of the total volume of the Atlantic slave trade. This is due to the fact that all recorded data have not yet been found or have disappeared for good. Like any other trade, the slave trade also involved undocumented smuggling. For this reason, the TSTD includes an estimate on the total volume of the trade that tries to take into account the number of slaves imported in the Americas on slaving voyages which have not been documented. While the documented Voyages Database presents a total that is the absolute minimum number of slaves involved in the Atlantic slave trade, the estimates indicates a calculated approximation of all African slaves who were possibly taken to the Americas. Because the sources covering Portuguese/Brazilian involvement in the trade have most notoriously been lost, the Estimates give a much higher figure for the Brazilian slave imports than indicated by the documented voyages.³

There are thus two sets of numbers in the database that can be used in assessing the volume of the trade from Africa to the Americas. The current estimate is that over 12.3 million slaves were exported from Africa between 1501 and 1866 and that approximately 10.5 million slaves arrived alive in the Americas. The documented numbers, according to the Voyages Database, indicate that 9,228,134 enslaved individuals were embarked in Africa and that 8,031,702 of them arrived alive in the Americas. It is estimated that, during the eighteenth century, some 2.21 million African slaves were taken on ships heading to Brazil and that 1.99 million of them arrived at their destination. For the eighteenth century, the documented voyages for Brazil list 1,465,341 slaves

² Thornton 1998a, pp. 190-191.

³ For a discussion on the new TSTD, see Eltis and Richardson 2008. As Verger 1976, pp. 8-9, discusses, much of the Brazilian data concerning the slave trade was destroyed in the aftermath of the abolition of slavery in the country in 1888.

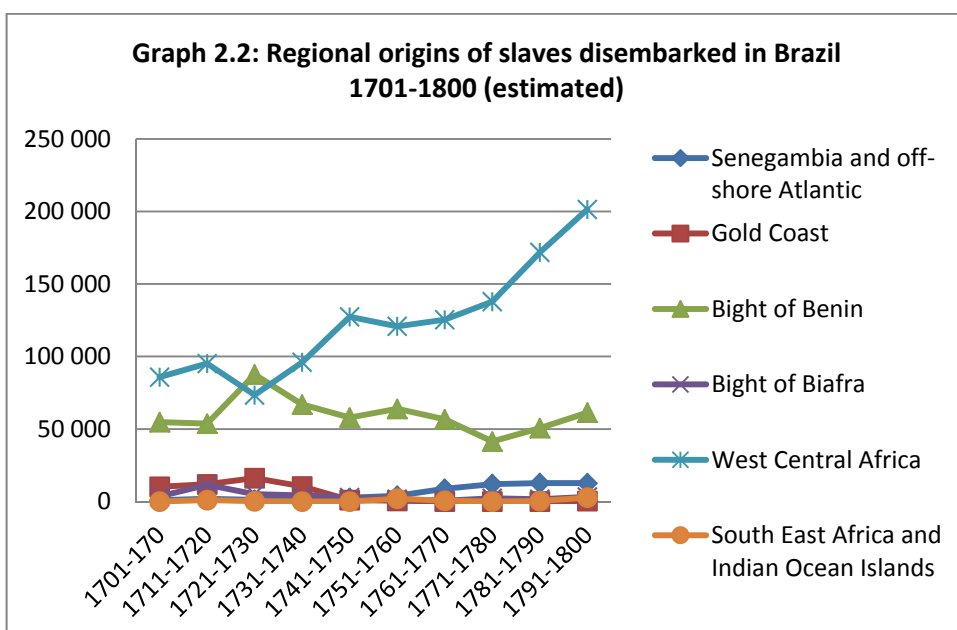
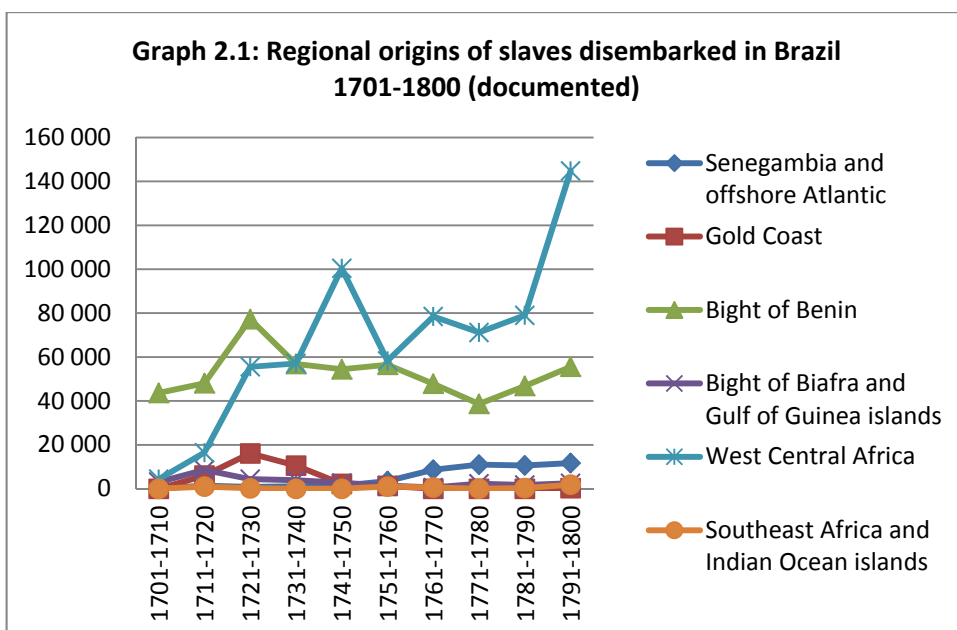
embarked in Africa with 1,320,495 disembarked in Brazil. As can be seen, the estimate is that some 700,000 slaves exported from Africa are missing from the Brazilian import data.⁴

While the documented voyages indicate the number of slaves exported on all ships for which records exist, estimates of the total volume are considerably higher. This has to be taken into account when looking at the regional origins of Africans in Brazil, because calculations of the relative numbers of slaves exported from different African regions yield different numbers depending on whether one uses the Voyages Database or the Estimates. Graphs 2.1 and 2.2 present the regional African origins of slaves disembarked in Brazil during the eighteenth century.

As Graph 2.1 indicates, Central Africa was by far the biggest exporter of slaves to Brazil during the eighteenth century, accounting for approximately half of the 1,320,495 known disembarked slaves. However, the estimated number of slave exports from Central Africa raises the volume even higher, accounting for 1.23 million people, or 62% of the total volume, whereas the documented voyages only account 665,000 imported Central Africans in Brazil. Thus, the significance of Central Africa as a major exporting region of slaves is indisputable. Portuguese, or during the eighteenth century, Brazilian presence in Angola was based on over two centuries of trade and cultural contact. Earlier centuries of contact had effectively established the conventions of trading. Portuguese power in West Central Africa offered both Portuguese and Brazilian slave traders a monopoly position in the local slave market. In Angola, they did not have to compete with traders of other European nations as fiercely as in West Africa.

But even if Brazil absorbed the majority of its slaves during the whole of the eighteenth century from West Central Africa, there were considerable variations in the patterns of trade over time. Judging by the number of documented imports, slaves from the Bight of Benin dominated the first three decades of trade in the eighteenth century. However, from 1701 to 1720, the estimated number raises the proportion from West Central Africa enormously and at the same time indicates only a slight increase from the Bight of Benin, giving West Central Africa a lead in the numbers. Only during the 1720s, the position of the Bight of Benin was indisputable. The high proportion of imports from West Africa, from what the Brazilians called *Costa da Mina* (Mina coast) during the early eighteenth century, probably reflects the high demand for West African slaves, generically called Mina, in colonial Brazil.

⁴ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces>;
<http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces> [both accessed 21 June 2011].



Source for Graphs 2.1 and 2.2: TSTD Voyages Database and Estimates (see Appendix for figures)

Many studies have emphasized the dominance of Mina slaves in Minas Gerais during the first half of the eighteenth century. This will be analyzed in subchapter 3.2 by looking at sources from Minas Gerais, but here it is important to note that slave imports in the coastal ports of Brazil have to be taken into account when assessing the composition of the slave population that was transported into the interior of Brazil. Central Africans already arrived in Brazil in much higher proportions in the early decades of the eighteenth century than has been assumed. The documented imports show a dominance of Central Africans from the 1730s onwards, a domination that only grew as the century progressed. Only Senegambia shows similar consistent growth throughout the century, although on a much smaller scale than Central Africa.

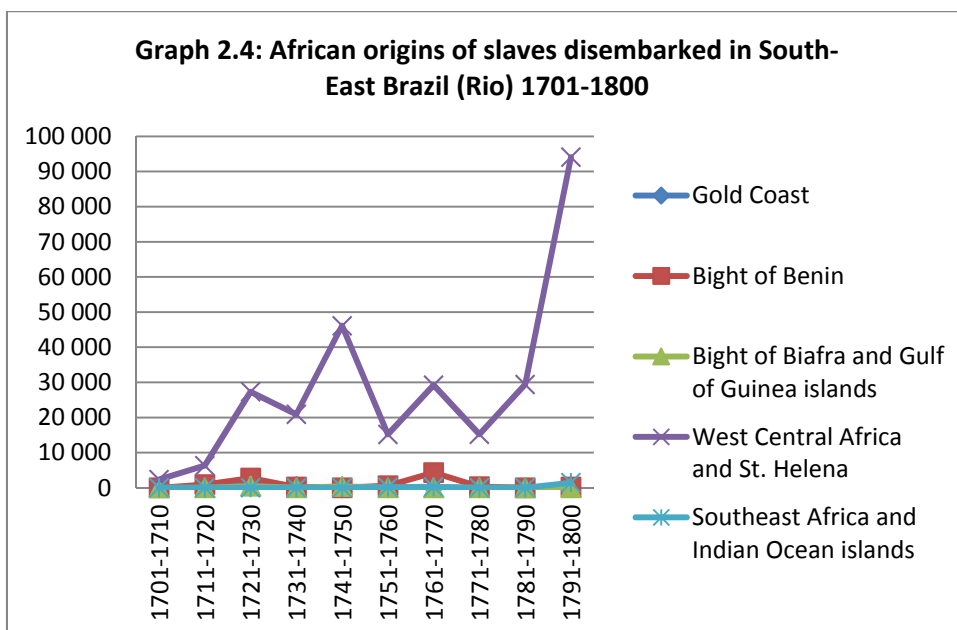
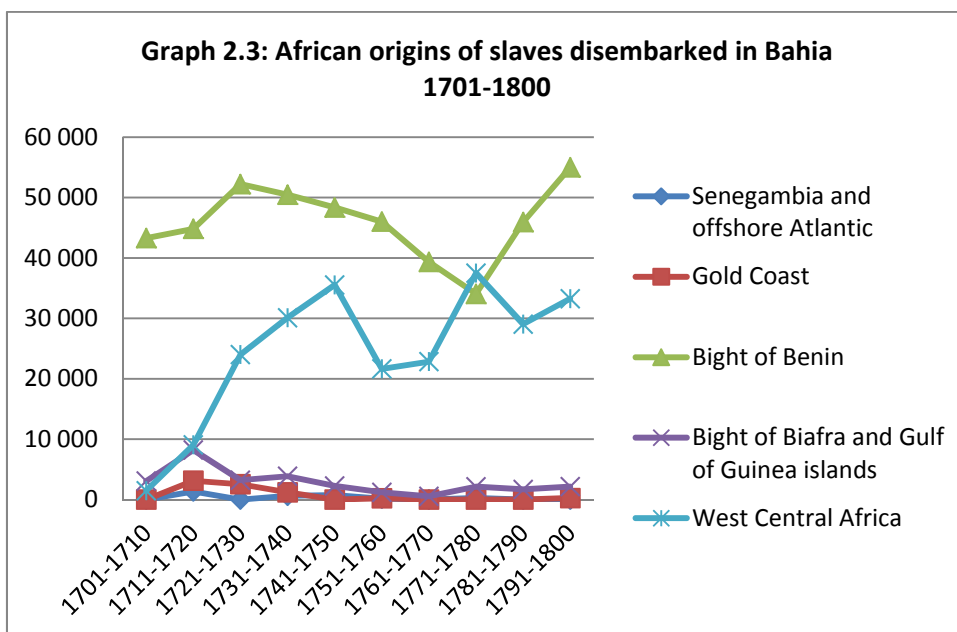
Slaves arrived in Minas Gerais mainly through two gateways, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. The principal route in the early decades of the eighteenth century was the *Caminho da Bahia* that connected Salvador with Sabará and Vila Rica. The connection from Minas Gerais to Rio de Janeiro led through the *Caminho Velho* and then increasingly through the *Caminho Novo*. Comparing the regional origins of slaves being disembarked in the ports of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro gives further clues of how the slave population in Minas Gerais was shaped. The documented voyages in the TSTD indicate that, during the eighteenth century, Bahia received 752,000 slaves whereas Rio de Janeiro received 302,000 or four-tenths of the number that went to Bahia. As can be seen from Graphs 2.3 and 2.4, the African origins in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro differed markedly from each other.

West African slaves from the Mina coast, or the Bight of Benin, dominated slave imports into Bahia throughout the eighteenth century.⁵ Only during the 1770s were they surpassed in number by imports from West Central Africa. West Central Africans were the second most imported group in Bahia, accounting for about a third of the total disembarkations during the century.⁶ The proportion of Central Africans remained fairly steady throughout the century. Slaves from the Bight of Benin and West Central Africa comprised over 90% of the slave population imported to Bahia. Re-export of slaves from Bahia to Minas Gerais was at its highest during the first half of the century, so a considerable number of Mina slaves would have arrived in the interior through the *Caminho da Bahia*.

In Rio de Janeiro, the number of slave imports shows a much closer connection to West Central Africa than to any other African region. Almost 95% of slaves offloaded in Rio de Janeiro came from Central Africa. Only during the 1720s and the 1760s were the imports from the Bight of Benin of some significance. The rise in West African imports in the 1720s probably reflected the high

⁵ On the trade relations between Bahia and *Costa da Mina*, see Verger 1976.

⁶ On the links between Bahia and West Central Africa, see Candido 2011b.



Source for Graphs 2.3 and 2.4: TSTD Voyages Database (see Appendix for figures)

demand for slaves in Minas Gerais. This is reflected especially in the number of imports from the Gold Coast during that decade. It is notable that imports from the Gold Coast also peaked in number during the 1720s in Bahia. However, even during the 1720s, Central Africans formed the majority of the slaves imported into Rio de Janeiro, although that was the decade when the proportional number of Central Africans was at its lowest. In fact, taking the total number of slave disembarkations in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro during the 1720s, the number of Central Africans is almost 45%, with slaves from West African ports accounting for the rest.

The numbers provided by the TSTD on the regional African origins of slaves taken to Brazil, and to Rio de Janeiro and Bahia specifically, challenge the long held notion that West Africans completely dominated the slave population of Minas Gerais in the first half of the eighteenth century. This argument is valid for the first two decades, and, if one accepts the estimates presented in Graph 2.2, it would also be true for the 1720s. However, in light of documented slave disembarkations in Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, Central Africans were already close behind West Africans in the 1720s. It is of course possible that only West African slaves were re-exported into the mines of Minas Gerais while all the Central Africans stayed on the coastal plantations and towns. To know whether this was the case, sources from Minas Gerais are needed to clarify the constitution of the local slave population. This question will be addressed in Chapter 3. The remainder of this chapter focuses on West Central Africa to give a clearer picture of the origins of slaves in this region.

2.2 Land and Economy in Central Africa

By the early eighteenth century, Portuguese settlers had already been in West Central Africa for over two centuries. Initially their influence was concentrated almost solely on the coastal regions, and only the most adventurous or desperate individuals made their way to the hinterland of the colony. As time elapsed, Portuguese presence increased and enterprising missionaries and trade agents established permanent outposts inland. Due to their activities and the written sources they have left, one gets a glimpse of what daily life was like for the inhabitants who had been dwelling in the forests and savannas of Central Africa for centuries. The geographical and ecological characteristics set the limits for the development of societies and interaction between communities in this region.

The region from which Central African slaves came was bordered in the north by the western equatorial forest of the central basin of the Congo River. In the woodlands and savannas south of the forest, the eastern fringes

of the slave catchment zone passed the Kasai River and, farther to the south, the headwaters of the Zambezi also felt the impact of Atlantic slaving during the late eighteenth century.⁷ The southern boundaries of the zone lay in the interior deltas of the Kubango and the lower Kunene rivers at the edge of the Kalahari Desert.⁸ Nearly everyone in this extensive region spoke languages of Bantu origin. The settlement progressed gradually as the early Bantu-speaking forebears filled the most desirable lands in the marshlands northwest of the middle reaches of the Congo River, with small groups breaking away to explore the grassy woodlands to the south. The early settlers created differentiated local communities out of their common ancestry by settling in the lands they claimed.⁹

Although the absolute number of Central Africans in the eighteenth century is uncertain, their distribution is relatively well-known. According to Miller, most of the occupants of West Central Africa clustered in the best watered river valleys, along the banks of the larger streams – the Kwango and Kwanza in the west, the floodplain of the upper Zambezi in the southeast, and the lower Kunene and Kubango in the south. The relatively rainy high plateau within the bends of the Kwanza and Kunene rivers was particularly populous. People tended to congregate in the wetter woodlands and forest-savannah mosaics of the inland plateau that were susceptible to more rainfall – rains increased from south to north and contributed profoundly to the transitions in vegetation and population. The coastlands, on the contrary, were too dry to support extensive farming populations, who lived in the more reliable climate zones of the east.¹⁰

The kingdom of Kongo, contacted by the Portuguese in 1483, was one of the major enslavement zones in Central Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Ecology was one of the various factors which impacted on Kongo society. There were three ecological zones, each of which roughly paralleled the coast. The coastal zone was sparsely populated and human occupation was determined by irregular rainfall. People tended to settle in the river valleys and on the hills of the Congo estuary. Between the Bengo and Congo rivers, higher rainfall supported acacia and raffia palms, but the hills of the Congo estuary were the most productive part of the coastal zone. The coastal lowlands were separated from the Central African high plateau by the great escarpment. Further inland, the middle zone was the most hospitable and

⁷ On the extent of the slave catchment zone or 'slaving frontier', see Miller 1988, pp. 140-153.

⁸ Slaving spread to this southern zone relatively late, in the eighteenth century. In the Ovambo kingdoms of southern Angola, slave trading did not reach its peak until the late nineteenth century, well after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. Miller 1997b; and Gustafsson 2005.

⁹ On the early formation of societies in Central Africa, see Vansina 2004.

¹⁰ Miller 1988, pp. 7-17, and 2002, p. 38. Accordingly, in the kingdom of Kongo, narrow settled valleys that were separated from each other by mountains were ideal areas for settlement. See Thornton 1983, p. 6.

supported the highest population densities. The vegetation varied from light savannah in the south-west to the cloud forest on the mountains. The third ecological zone south of the Congo River was the inhospitable eastern plateau, which did not form a part of the nuclear kingdom. It consisted of infertile sandy sediments, and although rainfall was high, it quickly drained away through the porous soil.¹¹

The rough and broken plateau south of Kongo was the home of the Dembos. A group of small states occupied the mountainous terrain that protected them from their more powerful neighbors. The coast further south became even more arid as one approached Luanda, the capital of Angola. Only rivers arriving at the sea made these areas somewhat habitable. Luanda was located next to a natural harbor in land that was otherwise marginal. The city had to constantly rely on supplies from the interior, either from the Bengo River valley or from the Kwanza River.¹² The interior behind Luanda was the core territory of the kingdom of Ndongo, situated on a high plateau between the Kwanza and Lukala rivers. In the east, Ndongo was limited by the Kwango River that runs in a deep depression called *Baixa de Cassange*. Here was situated the ancient state of Matamba that was conquered in the seventeenth century by Queen Nzinga who was forced to retreat eastward from Ndongo to escape the Portuguese military activities. East of the Kwango River, the land was flatter but never very densely inhabited. The conquests of the Lunda Empire in the mid-eighteenth century brought people in this region into the orbit of the Atlantic slave trade.¹³

The central highlands east of Benguela were populated by farmers later dubbed collectively as Ovimbundu. There was little unity among these people throughout the entire plateau, but a number of independently-minded lords based in stone-walled fortresses on rocky elevations sought dominance over the surrounding plains. Among the largest of these kingdoms were Wambu in the center and Mbailundu in the north. For ordinary people, the greatest concern was to have protection against marauding armies. Frequent raiding in this area made agriculture difficult and left people vulnerable to enslavement.¹⁴ The agropastoralists of the Kunene lived in the southern fringes of the region. After the establishment of Benguela in 1617, Portuguese influence spread to the kingdom of Humbe Inene and led to growing destabilization in southern Angola.¹⁵

Agricultural background was common to almost all of the Central Africans who became slaves during the eighteenth century. Those from grassy

¹¹ Thornton 1983, pp. 1-6; Hilton 1985, pp. 1-2.

¹² Even drinking water had to be imported to Luanda. In the late eighteenth century, much of the drinking water was still being brought to the city from Bengo. Azeredo 1799, pp. 37-41.

¹³ Thornton 2007, pp. 84-85.

¹⁴ Miller 1988, pp. 28-30.

¹⁵ Obi 2008, pp. 46-47.

woodlands cultivated sorghum and millet with hoes on plots of land that they cleared and planted. Declining soil fertility led farmers to abandon their plots every few years and to move on to clear and plant land elsewhere. In the forested regions of the Congo River, people added bananas and root crops to their diet. People lived in small village communities of kin, in-laws, clients, and others of familiar backgrounds. These small communities sought to grow by reproducing dependents and by attracting clients. Success meant denser populations that led to growing uniqueness and specialized exchange.¹⁶

Agriculture was the dominant economic activity in almost all of Central Africa. Raising cattle was especially important in the southern part of the region along the Kunene and Kubango rivers. Elsewhere, people concentrated on cultivation. A strict sexual division of labor was one of the most fundamental factors of production. The men were responsible for clearing the forest or the scrub. They provided tree crops such as palm wine, fruit and medicines, palm or bark cloth, and they built the houses. The women worked in the fields and raised crops, and provided the bulk of the food for daily meals.¹⁷ During the eighteenth century, the Atlantic slave trade drained the male population of Central Africa. About two thirds of the exported slaves were men and the female population that was left behind had to assume masculine responsibilities as well. Men also tended to escape the threat of enslavement to adjacent territories, so that Angola, according to Miller, suffered from a general shortage of male labor throughout the colony.¹⁸

Central Africa was very sparsely populated in the early centuries of the Atlantic slave trade. Thornton has established that average population density in the kingdom of Kongo was about three people per square kilometer. Other areas, such as the highlands around Ndongo or the Angolan central plateau further south may have had higher densities. Local centers of population were created by rulers, who built very densely settled capital districts. For example, in Kongo's capital of Mbanza Kongo or São Salvador the population density exceeded fifty per square kilometer. Within a few kilometers radius of São Salvador the population probably numbered one hundred thousand. However, most Central Africans lived in scattered villages that rarely had larger populations than two hundred. If circumstances required, whole villages could move from one location to another. Wars often focused on areas of dense population, making the residents of capital regions somewhat more likely to be enslaved than those residing in the rural areas.¹⁹

¹⁶ Miller 2002, p. 38.

¹⁷ Thornton 1983, p. 29; Hilton 1985, p. 6.

¹⁸ Miller 1988, pp. 268-269.

¹⁹ Thornton 2007, pp. 87, 93.

Two agricultural imports from the Americas helped Central African societies to grow. By the eighteenth century, manioc, or cassava, had been adopted by peoples living in the savannah as well as in the moister river valleys. Miller has argued that manioc encouraged more intensive settlement of less desirable lands because it required less labor to plant and to tend than the bananas and pulses that supplemented cereal diet in the wetter areas nearer the forest. Cassava cultivation reduced mortality levels as it spread eastward from the coast with the trade in slaves from the early seventeenth century. Another important agricultural improvement was the introduction of maize from the Americas that eventually enriched the diets of people in better-watered areas where the rains were sufficient to meet its higher moisture requirements. However, maize exhausted the soils more rapidly than manioc or other grains, and it needed greater inputs of labor for the frequent clearing of new fields. The introduction of cassava and maize permitted population growth to levels that had been previously unattainable.²⁰

Population growth in West Central Africa had exceeded the long-term capacity of the locations, in which people preferred to live, to support them by at least the late sixteenth century. In the drier parts of the region, farmers tended to move out of moist river valleys in times of plentiful rains to occupy higher lands that were incapable of sustaining agriculture during periods of drought. During the eighteenth century serious droughts occurred at least once each decade and the hardy folk who had opened marginal farming areas were exposed to famine. Thus, population levels collapsed outside the main agricultural areas during major droughts.²¹

Climate had an effect on the history and politics of Central Africa. Rains failed regularly, but, according to Miller, drought was most severe in the 1780s and 1790s. This was also the time when slave exports from Luanda and Benguela surged and reached their historic peak. It is thus necessary to draw a connection between the famines that ravaged Central Africa at that time and the growing volume of the Atlantic slave trade, although it should be kept in mind that there must also have been a considerable demand for slaves in the New World during that period. As Miller has shown, occurrences of drought often paralleled outbreaks of disease in many regions. People weakened by malnutrition became particularly vulnerable to diseases such as smallpox that led to increased mortality in the seaports and trading towns and along the slaving trails of the interior.²²

²⁰ Miller 1988, pp. 19-21.

²¹ Miller 1988, pp. 20-21.

²² Miller 1982, pp. 22-23, 29-30.

2.3 Central African Social and Political Systems

The social and political landscape of eighteenth-century West Central Africa was characterized by tight local communities defined most often by descent and local co-residence in small villages. Most people identified primarily with such small-scale notions of community, but in another instance, especially in the savannas, people began to identify with distinct, overarching political units. Early inhabitants of the western highlands above the Kwanza River gradually differentiated themselves from Kikongo speakers and became known as Mbundu. Individuals sought to increase their personal power by accumulating controllable, dependent persons who possessed as diverse a range of knowledge and skills as possible. Rich men gave things away to attract followers, and for many people, subordination to a powerful protector was the surest source of security.²³ Miller has argued that the farmers of Central Africa lived in many different cultural and social worlds of their own creation. They valued people, first and foremost, over material wealth, and emphasized group membership as opposed to individual autonomy. These local frames of reference contrasted with the Catholic and proto-national loyalties of contemporary Europeans and set them apart from the capitalist, Christian Atlantic world.²⁴

More lasting and larger social units as well as more centralized networks of political control emerged slowly. These could come to resemble states, with normative expectations of political behavior. By the late fifteenth century, a loose federative state formed in the hills just south of the lower Congo River. The ceremonial head of these competing regional aristocratic clans was the *mani* Kongo, who was able to gain unrestricted control over numerous personal followers. In the kingdom of Kongo, centralization reached its zenith in the sixteenth century, and the kingdom disintegrated as a large unit over the course of the seventeenth century.²⁵ By the eighteenth century, better-defined political systems of lordship and tribute began to replace the vague ancient commonalities and provided new primary identities for many people elsewhere in Central Africa.

Inland, east of the Kwango River, the Lunda imperial network rose to prominence in the late seventeenth century. The Ruund warlords became known as the *mwaant yaav*, and they ruled and collected tribute from subordinate lords ruling riverain population nuclei. According to Miller, this network of bandit-like trading chiefs formed an integrated commercial and intelligence-gathering network and, for most the eighteenth century, struggled militarily to impose a degree of coherence on the congeries of tributary lords east of the Kwango. The

²³ Miller 1997a, pp. 234, 246.

²⁴ Miller 1997a, p. 253.

²⁵ Thornton 1983.

Ruund *mwaant yaav* first preyed on the dense populations of the forest fringes immediately north of their military camps. Eventually, they were responsible for raiding a growing diversity of inland people in the densely inhabited regions of the interior for captives.²⁶ Lunda influence also extended into the valley of the upper Zambezi River, where people living under a variety of local grandees acquired the collective designation of Luvale by the latter part of the eighteenth century.²⁷

In the central highlands, the Ovimbundu farmers shared similar linguistic traits, but they did not claim unity throughout the entire plateau during the eighteenth century. Their traditions derived from a combination of ancient rainmaking kings, rich warlords, and a late sixteenth-century military cult recalled in the eighteenth century as the “Jaga”, or Imbangala, as it was known to its participants.²⁸ The Imbangala were recruited to fight for the Portuguese during the governorship of Luis Mendes de Vasconcelos in Angola (1617-1621). With their help, the Portuguese succeeded against many of their African opponents, and the number of enslaved people sent to the Americas rose substantially.²⁹ A number of independent Ovimbundu lords, claiming descent from the seventeenth-century Imbangala warlords, commanded domains that competed violently throughout the Umbundu-speaking areas of the high plateau. Among the largest and most powerful of these kingdoms were Wambu in the center and Mbailundu in the north. The easterly kingdom of Bihe grew in importance only later in the eighteenth century. The people of the highlands sought protection under the warlords against the armies of the others, and the violence divided people into several hostile refugee communities. Scattered among these states lived a number of European, Brazilian and Luso-African traders.³⁰

Miller has demonstrated that the upper parts of the Kwango valley and portions of the surrounding high plains to the south and west were dominated by the Kasanje lords, preserving Imbangala political ideas and practices centered on warfare and cannibalism like those of the highland proto-Ovimbundu rulers.³¹ To the north lay a similar but smaller and briefer-lived trading state known as Holo that grew powerful from the 1730s to the 1760s before succumbing to pressures emanating from the Lunda lords. In the western parts of the Kwango

²⁶ Miller 1988, pp. 26-27, and 2002, pp. 50-51.

²⁷ Papstein 1978.

²⁸ The Imbangala expansion of the sixteenth century has been subject to extensive research. See Vansina 1963 and 1966; Birmingham 1965; Miller 1972 and 1976, pp. 167-175.

²⁹ Thornton 2007, p. 89. As many as 50,000 people may have been enslaved during Mendes de Vasconcelos' term.

³⁰ Miller 1988, pp. 28-30, and 2002, p. 52.

³¹ The Imbangala captured their members violently. These warriors, usually captured as adolescent boys, were held in military service for the rest of their life through participation in an enforced ritual involving cannibalism that they were required to repeat from time to time. Thornton 2007, p. 94.

valley people lived under monarchs who claimed the ancient title of the Ngola a Kiluanje, rulers of the sixteenth-century kingdom of Ndongo in middle Kwanza and the surrounding plateau. Among their titles they also retained that of “Jinga”, after the seventeenth-century queen who had succeeded the Ngola. These rulers had consolidated their polity in the part of the valley known then as Matamba, and they controlled a slaving market similar to that in Kasanje of which they were great competitors. Thousands of slaves from the east beyond the Kwango were diverted each year to the coast through Kasanje and Matamba.³²

The area between the Kanda Mountains in the north and the Dembo hills in the south was loosely controlled by provincial Kongo lords. The area had been united politically until the 1660s, when the kingdom of Kongo began to slide into civil wars.³³ The merchant princes that held real power among the eighteenth-century Kikongo-speakers had preserved the European titles of nobility (counts, dukes, marquises, etc.) and still fought for the royal title, the *mani* Kongo. The largest domain in this area was the Soyo principality that controlled the coast north of the Mbrije River and southern banks of the lower Congo River.³⁴

In the equatorial forests of the Zaire basin collective identities were less clear-cut. Small federations of villages were connected to each other by the canoe traffic that moved slaves down the rivers, and by the eighteenth century, traders along the main rivers started to form extended networks. However, these forest environments with lower population densities did not become major sources of slaves before the nineteenth century. Slaves, forest products, fish and vegetables, and imports were exchanged in the marketplaces of Malebo Pool. These traders formed identities that were more the products of temporary association for business purposes than the more permanent loyalties of the farmers.³⁵

Miller has argued that, by the end of the seventeenth century, Africans everywhere west of the Kwango River encountered each other as members of new ethnic communities. These communities were formed around their identities as victims, raiders, or profiteers of the slave trade, and often had a centralized and militaristic character. The Kongo acquired much of their present identity in the course of the seventeenth century, through the unifying effects of Christianity. The Mbundu of the eighteenth century included descendants from old families of the Kwanza and Kwango valleys, but they also included the descendants of many others brought into the region as slaves and retained there. The Ovimbundu of the central highlands belonged to communities formed in

³² Miller 1988, pp. 32-34.

³³ For an interpretation of the civil wars and the political fragmentation of Kongo, see Thornton 1983, pp. 69-113.

³⁴ Miller 1988, p. 35.

³⁵ Harms 1981.

the central highlands during the eighteenth century. The Africans who sought to profit from the slave trade, besides sending their armies into neighboring regions in search of captives, used imported goods to create networks of indebted clients within their domains and to purchase slaves in remote regions. These commercial strategies gradually replaced violence at the core of even the most militaristic states in the 1760s and 1770s. The Lunda and other states in the east then became the violent captors of slaves for the remainder of the trade.³⁶

2.4 The Development of Atlantic Creole Culture

The *Reino de Angola* or the Portuguese colony of Angola, also called *conquista* or conquest of Angola in the Portuguese terminology of the time, was loosely defined as an area that lay between the lower Dande and Kwanza rivers. The *Reino de Angola* was governed from Luanda, established in 1575, but the Portuguese exerted only a loose dominion over its claimed colony. Besides Luanda, the *Reino* included the areas around the military forts of Muxima, Ambaca, Massangano, Cambambe and Pungo Andongo. The *Reino de Angola* was distinguished from the *Reino de Benguela*, which included the city of Benguela, the fort of Caconda, and the immediate area around these settlements. African polities in the *Reino de Angola* were ruled by *sobas*, who acted as local headmen in the rural villages of the colony. Demographically the number of Portuguese living in Angola always remained low. Moreover, only a tiny number of Portuguese women ever settled in the colony. This demographic setting formed the basis for the development of Atlantic Creole culture in Angola.

Demographic mixing in Angola was the result of the unbalanced gender ratio among Portuguese colonists. As Cadornega noted in the second half of the seventeenth century, in the absence of white women Portuguese men had children with black women. Many *mulatos* and *pardos*³⁷ resulting from these consensual unions emerged into leading positions in the colony, especially in the military.³⁸ Alencastro has argued that whereas the *mulatos* of Brazil never turned into a significant social group because of their failure to assimilate European cultural practices, in Angola the opposite was the case. Portuguese soldiers often took wives from the families of their African allies and clients to form households of Portuguese parentage on the fathers' side, but these families often had a distinctly African character derived from the domestic influence

³⁶ Miller 1997a, pp. 268-270.

³⁷ The racial categories of *mulato* (f. *mulata*) and *pardo* (f. *parda*) were used ambiguously in the Portuguese colonial world. Usually, *pardo* was a generic term for anyone of mixed background involving varying degrees of European and African ancestry. *Mulato* was usually a less inclusive term, referring to individuals whose fathers were Portuguese.

³⁸ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 30.

of their mothers and African servants.³⁹ In eighteenth-century Angola, Luso-African families of this sort were the dominant influences on the politics and commerce of the colony. Their marital and trading alliances reached deep into families controlling the African polities.⁴⁰ Through the generations, these families tended to become more and more African in appearance and substantially in culture as well.

Heywood and Thornton have argued that the development of Atlantic Creole culture in Central Africa commenced in the late fifteenth century in the kingdom of Kongo. Kongo's ruler Nzinga a Nkuwu became interested in Portuguese culture after 1484, when the Portuguese navigator Diogo Cão and his crew landed in Soyo, Kongo's province on the coast. After talks with the Portuguese explorers Nzinga a Nkuwu requested priests, carpenters and stonemasons to build a "house of prayer" in Portuguese style, farmers to teach them to till the soil with ploughs, and women to teach the baking of bread. Some Kongoleses children were sent to Europe to learn to read and write and become Christian. On their return, this bilingual and bicultural group began to spread the new ideas throughout the kingdom. The early Atlantic Creole culture in Kongo was marked by Christian conversion and literacy. As will be discussed further in Chapter 5, Christian ideas were mixed with local religious concepts. The cultural mixture in Kongo was consolidated by Nzinga a Nkuwu's son Afonso, who ruled between 1509 and 1542. Besides adopting a Christian identity, the Atlantic Creole culture was represented by knowledge of the Portuguese language and European political ideas, adoption of mixed European and African names, some changes in dress with the adoption of imported cloth and clothing items, some mixing of musical styles, and the absorption of American food crops and preparation techniques.⁴¹

In the Mbundu region of Angola, Atlantic Creole culture emerged through contact with Kongo, and as a result of Jesuit missions that came to Ndongo with Paulo Dias de Novais' missions in 1560 and 1575. This cultural influence thereafter emanated gradually inland from Luanda. Jesuits extended Christianity in the region but remained hostile to the Atlantic Creole form of Christianity, which involved a great deal of religious mixture. Jesuits trained chapel boys not only in Christian teachings, but also in European musical instruments that contributed to the development of Atlantic Creole culture among the Mbundu. Besides Jesuits, numerous Luso-African secular priests were present in Angola. Secular clergy generally tolerated a wider range of religious practices and influenced a Mbundu version of Atlantic Creole

³⁹ Alencastro 2000, pp. 350-353.

⁴⁰ Miller 1997a, pp. 271-273. This was the case especially in Luanda and its hinterland. In contrast, Benguela was dominated mostly by Brazilian merchants, who came to trade there, usually briefly. Luanda's control over affairs in Benguela was always wavering.

⁴¹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 60-67.

Christianity that was taking shape.⁴²

In the seventeenth century, Kongo and Portuguese Angola remained the core Atlantic Creole regions in West Central Africa. In the kingdom of Kongo, Atlantic Creole culture continued to be manifested in Kongo's status as a Christian country with a wide range of Catholic organizations such as the Order of Christ and *Santa Casa de Misericordia* or Holy House of Mercy. Portuguese and Luso-African merchants had a permanent presence in various commercial and political centers in Kongo and they helped to ease the incorporation of European elements into Kongo's Atlantic Creole culture.⁴³ Kongo's rulers relied on European-style diplomacy and sent missions to Rome to promote Kongo as a full-fledged member of the Christian community.⁴⁴

In the Portuguese *Reino de Angola*, the most intense interaction between Luso-Africans and Mbundu took place in Luanda and its immediate surroundings. Mbundu participated in the Atlantic Creole world most visibly by adhering to Catholicism. Although a shortage of funds and missionaries constrained the formal spread of Christianity, many Mbundu converted, although critical voices argued that a fairly large group of Mbundu were "Christians in name only". In addition to Luanda, Heywood and Thornton have included the districts of Bengo, Massangano and Ambaca among the core Atlantic Creole areas. The intermediate Atlantic Creole regions included the kingdoms of Ndongo and Matamba, where fewer Atlantic Creole elements were integrated into pre-existing religious practices. The outer Atlantic Creole zone in Central Africa included north-eastern Kongo, Loango and southern Angola.⁴⁵

An important aspect of Atlantic Creole culture was language use in the *Reino de Angola*. As Vansina has shown, Portuguese was spoken only by a small minority of European immigrants, native-born Luso-Africans called *filhos da terra* (children of the land), and their slaves. Instead, Kimbundu was the preferred language among the settlers and native Central Africans. The dominance of Kimbundu can be explained by the low number of Portuguese settlers who arrived in Angola prior to the nineteenth century. As women settlers were rare, Portuguese men had children with African women. The education of the children of settlers was left to their African mothers and the slave women in the household apart from the sons of the principal Portuguese officers in the army or the administration, who learned enough Portuguese to occupy these official posts as adults. Kimbundu flourished to the extent that the Jesuit missionaries strove to learn it and composed a Kimbundu catechism, printed in 1642. Until the recovery of Portuguese began in the early nineteenth century,

⁴² Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 98-105.

⁴³ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 170-183.

⁴⁴ Heywood and Thornton 2007b, pp. 201-207.

⁴⁵ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 186-207.

Kimbundu enjoyed the status of the common language of Angola (*língua geral*) throughout the eighteenth century, a situation that was criticized by various governors.⁴⁶ The standing of Kimbundu in seventeenth-century Luanda was aptly revealed by Cadornega, who listed honorific titles in Kimbundu given by the local population for various governors of Angola.⁴⁷

One way in which the spread of Atlantic Creole culture was manifested in Central Africa was the adoption of new naming practices. In Kongo, the people attached baptismal names to Kikongo personal names. Some people also used double Christian names, such as “António Manuel” and “Miguel Daniel”. Ndongo naming pattern followed similar rules to those of Kongo. Baptized commoners and slaves of the Portuguese typically had a single Christian name.⁴⁸ Even people who were not baptized used a Portuguese name. This was the case, for example, with a popular healer named Cazolla ca Ganga, active near Ambaca in the mid-eighteenth century, who was known to her customers by the Christian name Esperança. Portuguese names carried prestige, and Esperança, meaning hope, had chosen a name that described the expectations of her customers regarding her ritual practices.⁴⁹

Heywood has argued that creolization based on biological and cultural intermixture continued unabated throughout the eighteenth century. Central Africans were not the only ones who changed as a result of the spread of Portuguese cultural influences; Portuguese settlers were also heavily influenced by African culture. Portuguese and Brazilian settlers and their white and Afro-Portuguese children, the children of free Africans and mulattoes, and their slaves continued molding African and European elements of their heritage to form a distinctive Atlantic Creole culture. Many of the slaves in Angola, who had been born into the households of the Portuguese and Luso-Africans, were bilingual in Portuguese and Kimbundu, and had been baptized as Catholics. Processes of creolization affected not only religious rituals, naming practices, and language, but also public celebrations, medical practices, cuisine, music, and dance. Cultural influences were spread to the interior by missionaries, traders, Portuguese officials, and free and enslaved Africans. African military units, known as *guerra preta*, offered many opportunities for Africans to influence Portuguese culture.⁵⁰

Many officials, both secular and ecclesiastical, sent from Portugal during the eighteenth century openly criticized the cultural practices they encountered on their arrival in Luanda. For example, the Bishop of Angola

⁴⁶ Vansina 2001-3, pp. 268-275.

⁴⁷ Cadornega 1940, vol. II, p. 369.

⁴⁸ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 208-210.

⁴⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 13836, ff. 43v, 126v, 133. Central African naming patterns are further discussed in Thornton 1993b and Curto 2005, pp. 76-77.

⁵⁰ Heywood 2002.

complained in 1739 that the ignorance of priests, most of whom were Luso-Africans and free blacks born in Angola, was the cause of great damage because many of them could not read and were incapable of fulfilling their duties.⁵¹ Governor Alvares da Cunha noted grimly that the customs of the residents in the colony of Angola “are barbaric, their language is Kimbundu, and their laws those of heathens”.⁵² However, the extent of creolization in Angola was most copiously revealed by the Governor Souza Coutinho in 1766, when he wrote that “here the subjugated people do not receive the customs of the conqueror, rather to the contrary, these [the conquerors] appropriate a form of heathenism and superstition”.⁵³

These remarks show that, in terms of cultural exchange, African culture remained dominant in Angola and greatly influenced the daily lives of Portuguese settlers. However, Atlantic Creole culture in Angola and Kongo spread to the extent that a great number of enslaved Central Africans arrived in Brazil and elsewhere in the Americas with certain conceptions of European culture. Many of them were baptized and those who had been in contact with Portuguese settlers or their Luso-African descendants could speak some Portuguese. Central Africans brought various elements of this culture with them to the mines and urban centers of Minas Gerais. What this meant in religious terms will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.5 Organization of the Slave Trade in West Central Africa

In the eighteenth century, the slave trade in West Central Africa was centered in the ports of Luanda and Benguela. Besides these main ports, there were numerous points along the coast from which slaving ships could draw their cargo, as well as major ports along the Loango Coast. Although dubbed Portuguese trade, the slaving business in West Central Africa was in reality dominated by Brazilians at its operational level. Ships carrying the slaves generally started their voyages in Brazil, and the captains and crews of these ships came from there. Brazilian merchants were better located to handle communications between the port towns of Angola and Brazil than Lisbon traders, who had to rely on their intermediaries in Brazil to contact their African agents. Lisbon-based merchants tended to concentrate their trading in Luanda, where governors appointed by the king of Portugal channeled business into the hands of resident factors increasingly

⁵¹ AHU, Angola, Caixa 31, Document 9, Ofício de Bispo de Angola, 23 February 1739. For a list of these priests in Central Africa from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, see Brásio 1973, pp. 892-924.

⁵² AHU, Angola, Caixa 39, Document 94, Carta do Governador D. Antonio Alvares da Cunha, 6 December 1754.

⁵³ AHU, Angola, Caixa 50, Document 59, Carta do Governador de Angola, 26 November 1766.

representing Lisbon's interests after about 1750. Whereas the Brazilian-dominated trade was centered in Luanda, and increasingly in Benguela during the eighteenth century, other European national groups concentrated their activities on the Loango Coast and at other points dotted along the coast.⁵⁴

According to Miller, three distinct commercial networks brought slaves from the interior to the coast. The oldest of these networks had its main outlet in Luanda. The trade routes in this central network approached the coast from the east along the lower Bengo and Kwanza rivers. Directly east from Luanda, intermediaries in the middle Kwango valley obtained slaves principally from Kasanje. Miller has argued that most captives reaching Kasanje came from remote eastern portions of the forest-savanna mosaic through raids conducted by the Lunda warriors, but sources of captives were also located closer to the coast in the Kwango and Kwanza valleys. The northern network reached the Atlantic bays of the Loango Coast and the southern network led to Benguela. In the valley of the middle Kwango, Jinga, Kasanje's northern neighbor tapped the streams of slaves coming from the deep interior and often diverted them to the north. The Kongo sold their slaves both to Luanda and Loango, depending on where they found the greatest advantage. The Lunda themselves could send their trading caravans either toward Kasanje and ultimately Luanda, or towards the lower Congo River and Cabinda. The intermediaries in the Kwango valley as well as the Kongo could send slaves southwest toward Luanda, directly west to the Loje or Mbrije rivers, or northwest to Cabinda.⁵⁵ The competing networks obtained slaves partially from the same sources, because African suppliers in the interior could sell slaves to any of the competing networks.

The commercial networks of African intermediaries supplying the Benguela trade were similarly overlapped. According to Miller, in the southern network slaves arrived mostly from the western slopes of the central highlands directly east from Benguela. In the far southeast, traders obtained slaves from the pockets of population along the lower Kunene and other rivers. In the late eighteenth century, this network reached the upper Zambezi, where it tapped into the resources of the Lunda slavers who also supplied Luanda through Kasanje. Another source of slaves for Benguela was the northern highland toward the Kwanza River, an area that sent slaves to Luanda as well.⁵⁶ It is clear that, throughout the eighteenth century, Luanda and Benguela occasionally competed for the same sources of slaves.

People brought into the orbit of enslavement came from various locations in Central Africa. Miller has examined warfare as the principal mechanism of enslavement and developed the concept of a "slaving frontier".

⁵⁴ Miller 1989, pp. 389.

⁵⁵ Miller 1989, pp. 383-385.

⁵⁶ Miller 1989, p. 385 and 1997b; Obi 2008.

According to Miller, areas inland from Luanda, Benguela and the Loango Coast were stripped of population through war, and armies constantly had to go further inland to obtain captives. Starting in the sixteenth century, the slaving frontier zone moved inland from the coast, reaching the center of the continent by the middle third of the nineteenth century. According to Miller, only periodic succession struggles and banditry westward of this frontier disturbed the calm of everyday politics.⁵⁷ While it is certain that the influence of the Atlantic slave trade moved steadily inland, bringing imported goods into the hands of African rulers and sending captives to the coast, people still continued to be exported from areas nearer the coast that were already nominally under Portuguese rule.⁵⁸

Candido, in her study of the processes of enslavement in the Benguela hinterland, has challenged Miller's conception of the enslaving frontier. She has suggested that the frontiers of enslavement were actually layered, that "[s]laves not only came from increasing distances inland but people were enslaved locally as well, through tribute payments, judicial punishment, kidnapping, and raids." The populations along the coast were not protected from enslavement because the slavers took their victims in any way they could. Candido has argued that "no frontier existed in which the extension of enslavement moved in a linear fashion from the coast to the interior. Rather multiple layered frontiers existed." Thus, even subjects of rulers who had established peaceful relations with the Portuguese, were occasionally carried away by the slave ships to Brazil. According to Candido, "the slave trade left no one untouched, at least not in Benguela and its immediate interior."⁵⁹

Luanda was the main port of Angola supplying slaves to Brazil. The gold-rush in Minas Gerais in the early eighteenth century had an immediate impact on the demand for slaves in Luanda. Merchants from Rio de Janeiro sent their agents to Luanda and the price for slaves doubled between 1697 and 1701.⁶⁰ The development of Benguela occurred more slowly. In the seventeenth century and until 1716, slaves from Benguela had to be transported legally through Luanda. The number of slave exports from Benguela before 1716 is hard to estimate. Ferreira has suggested that Benguela became a key provider of slaves for Luanda in the 1680s, supplying one-third of the slaves exported through Luanda in that decade.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Miller 1988, p. 149.

⁵⁸ Concerning enslavement in nineteenth-century Angola, this argument is put forward by Silva 2010.

⁵⁹ Candido 2006, pp. 44-47.

⁶⁰ Ferreira 2003, pp. 35-36. For slave prices, see Miller 1986.

⁶¹ Ferreira 2003, p. 78.

Table 2.1 Slave exports from Luanda and Benguela, 1701-1800

	Curto Luanda	TSTD Luanda (documented)	Curto Benguela	TSTD Benguela (documented)
1701-1710	3,549	4,451		506
1711-1720	40,390	19,654		
1721-1730	54,635	62,657	2,035	967
1731-1740	84,510	67,940	2,691	1,359
1741-1750	107,470	112,451	6,894	12,671
1751-1760	98,468	66,513	20,441	9,306
1761-1770	82,237	88,177	49,399	5,323
1771-1780	76,762	56,257	54,735	24,990
1781-1790	96,327	77,473	64,719	22,627
1791-1800	100,438	108,681	82,157	55,260
Totals	744,786	664,254	283,071	133,009

Sources: Curto 1992 and 1993/1994; TSTD Voyages Database⁶²

After 1716 slaves were shipped from Benguela directly to the Americas, reflecting the increased demand for slaves in Brazil, especially in Minas Gerais. Luanda merchants were not pleased with this development, as some of the slave coffles that had earlier gone to Luanda were now being diverted to Benguela.⁶³ However, official figures show that Luanda's share of slave exports to Brazil remained dominant throughout the eighteenth century.

As shown in Table 2.1, the numbers provided by the TSTD for Luanda and Benguela are somewhat problematic. Curto, who has studied the legal Portuguese slave trade from Luanda and Benguela, arrives at different totals for several decades of the eighteenth century and for the century as a whole.⁶⁴ This indicates that there are still several voyages missing in the TSTD data but also that Curto's data on Angolan slave exports is incomplete. The TSTD seems to be particularly incomplete in the case of Benguela slave exports. However, Curto's data does not include information on the destinations of slaves in Brazil, whereas the TSTD can be used to study in which Brazilian ports West Central Africans arrived.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 compare documented slave exports from Luanda and Benguela to Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, the two main Brazilian regions that supplied slaves to Minas Gerais. The number of embarked slaves from the two

⁶² <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 27 June 2011].

⁶³ Candido 2006, p. 25.

⁶⁴ Curto 1992 and 1993/1994.

Table 2.2, Documented slave exports from Luanda and Benguela to Rio de Janeiro, number of slaves embarked

	Benguela		Luanda		Totals
1701-1710	118	4.4 %	2,580	95.6 %	2,698
1711-1720	0	0.0 %	7,082	100.0 %	7,082
1721-1730	331	1.1 %	30,711	98.9 %	31,042
1731-1740	804	3.4 %	23,005	96.6 %	23,809
1741-1750	2,239	4.3 %	50,304	95.7 %	52,543
1751-1760	1,461	8.7 %	15,291	91.3 %	16,752
1761-1770	0	0.0 %	31,996	100.0 %	31,996
1771-1780	8,254	49.2 %	8,538	50.8 %	16,792
1781-1790	170	0.5 %	31,874	99.5 %	32,044
1791-1800	41,945	41.1 %	60,164	58.9 %	102,109
Totals	55,322	17.5 %	261,545	82.5 %	316,867

Table 2.3, Documented slave exports from Luanda and Benguela to Bahia, number of slaves embarked

	Benguela		Luanda		Totals
1701-1710	0	0.0 %	1,635	100.0 %	1,635
1711-1720	0	0.0 %	10,306	100.0 %	10,306
1721-1730	636	2.3 %	26,574	97.7 %	27,210
1731-1740	169	0.5 %	33,973	99.5 %	34,142
1741-1750	10,432	25.6 %	30,351	74.4 %	40,783
1751-1760	7,529	31.9 %	16,083	68.1 %	23,612
1761-1770	4,943	19.7 %	20,155	80.3 %	25,098
1771-1780	12,788	31.6 %	27,649	68.4 %	40,437
1781-1790	13,420	43.7 %	17,292	56.3 %	30,712
1791-1800	9,499	26.3 %	26,680	73.7 %	36,179
Totals	59,674	22.1 %	210,698	77.9 %	270,372

Source for tables 2.2 and 2.3: TSTD Voyages Database⁶⁵

⁶⁵ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 27 June 2011]. See also Miller 1989.

Table 2.4, Average percentage male on slave embarkations in Benguela and Luanda to Brazil

	Benguela	Luanda	Averages
1758		75.3 %	75.3 %
1759		77.2 %	77.2 %
1772	80.0 %		80.0 %
1774		70.0 %	70.0 %
1776	69.7 %		69.7 %
1777	80.0 %		80.0 %
1778	79.8 %		79.8 %
1782	74.7 %		74.7 %
1785		59.7 %	59.7 %
Averages	76.5 %	70.6 %	74.7 %

Source: TSTD Voyages Database⁶⁶

main ports of Central Africa was somewhat greater to Rio de Janeiro than to Bahia. Rio de Janeiro merchants were slightly more active in Central Africa whereas Bahian merchants directed their slaving voyages to West Africa. The numbers of Benguela for the first two decades are problematic because until 1716, slaves from Benguela were exported through Luanda. The statistics of known exports show great variation over time. Exports to Rio de Janeiro were exceptionally low during the 1750s and 1770s. This again reflects change in the interior of Brazil as gold production in Minas Gerais began to wane in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, economic reconfigurations in production led to the recovery of slave imports in south-east Brazil, as almost a third of the total number of slaves brought from Central Africa landed in Rio de Janeiro during the 1790s. In Bahia, slave disembarkations from Angola peaked during the 1740s and 1770s. Slave imports were considerably lower in the first three decades of the century and then again in the 1750s and 1760s.

Judging by these numbers, Benguela slaves did not arrive in great numbers at Rio de Janeiro until the 1790s. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Benguela became closely connected to Rio de Janeiro, with at least 80% of the slave ships leaving Benguela going to Rio de Janeiro.⁶⁷ Earlier they went in greater numbers to Bahia.⁶⁸ This might partially explain the low number of slaves identified as Benguelas in Minas Gerais. Their number

⁶⁶ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 27 June 2011].

⁶⁷ Ferreira 2003, p. 138.

⁶⁸ For an overview of the Bahian trade, see Ribeiro 2008.

Table 2.5, Average percentage of children on slave embarkations in Benguela and Luanda to Brazil

	Benguela	Luanda	Averages
1723-1725		0.0%	0.0%
1726-1730		0.3%	0.3%
1731-1735		8.0%	8.0%
1736-1740	13.0%	9.2%	9.3%
1741-1745	9.8%	6.5%	6.7%
1746-1750	10.6%	10.0%	10.0%
1756-1760		1.4%	1.4%
1761-1765		2.6%	2.6%
1766-1770		1.7%	1.7%
1771-1775	0.2%	1.6%	1.1%
1776-1780	12.4%		12.4%
1781-1785		2.7%	2.7%
1791-1795	0.0%	0.3%	0.2%
1796-1800	5.5%	2.0%	2.2%
Averages	4.7%	4.2%	4.2%

Source: TSTD Voyages Database⁶⁹

rose enormously during the nineteenth century. However, one has to bear in mind that although Benguela exported slaves directly to Brazil after 1716, slaves continued to be shipped from Benguela to Luanda until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷⁰ Whether these slaves were identified by slave-owners in Brazil as Benguelas or Angolas (slaves coming from Benguela and Luanda, respectively) is open to question. This might also have depended on the provenance of the majority of slaves on any given ship that visited both Benguela and Luanda.

Slaving voyages from Central Africa did not carry men and women in equal numbers to Brazil. The TSTD offers only sketchy information on gender ratios derived from a very small sample (Table 2.4). Average percentages of males on ships taking slaves from Benguela and Luanda to Rio and Bahia varied from 70% (one ship from Luanda to Rio de Janeiro in 1774) to a high of 87% (a ship from Benguela to Rio de Janeiro in 1778). A small sample with data for 9 years including 13 voyages shows that the average percentage of males shipped from Luanda and Benguela to Brazil as a whole was almost 75%. Eltis

⁶⁹ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 27 June 2011].

⁷⁰ Candido 2006, p. 26.

and Engerman have noted that the proportion of males exported from Central Africa was higher than in other slave exporting regions.⁷¹

The imbalanced sex ratios had a marked effect on the demographic structure of the Central African population. Thornton has examined the census data produced by the Portuguese in 1777-78 and noted that the sex ratios were far from what might normally be expected. Females outnumbered males greatly even in the youngest age groups among the free population, and among the slave population of Angola, females over fifteen years of age formed an overwhelming proportion of the population. Thornton has concluded that “[e]ighteenth-century Angola was very much a female’s world, at least as far as numbers were concerned.”⁷²

Besides exporting a higher proportion of men than other regions, it has been claimed that Central African ports embarked the largest proportion of children in the whole trade.⁷³ However, according to the TSTD this was not so, at least not in the eighteenth century when the average percentage of children on the ships taking slaves from West Central Africa to the Americas was about 12.9%, whereas from the Bight of Biafra it was 23.0% and 18.4% in the Bight of Benin.⁷⁴ In West Central Africa, the percentage was even lower on the recorded voyages from Luanda and Benguela (see Table 2.5). The data on the average number of children embarked are more complete than the data on gender ratios. Altogether 602 voyages in the database leaving from Benguela and Luanda include records of the child ratios on these ships. A total of 529 ships went to either Bahia or Rio de Janeiro, with 26 leaving from Benguela and 503 leaving from Luanda. Because the data for the whole of Brazil are more indicative of the child ratio on voyages leaving from the two main ports of Central Africa, Table 2.5 shows the percentage of children on the 602 voyages going to Brazil as a whole in five year periods. As can be seen from these figures, the relative number of children on ships leaving from Luanda and Benguela remained low throughout the eighteenth century. However, Klein has reckoned that Portuguese officials did not pay much attention to recording the number of children on slave ships because they were unimportant to royal officials in terms of taxation. It is probable that many more children were shipped than were recorded by the port officials. The records indicate that the number of children declined towards the end of the century. If the decline was not due to recording errors, it might reflect a better supply of adult slaves available to the traders in Luanda and Benguela.⁷⁵

The African slave trade would not have operated without the participation of willing African rulers and merchants, who received trade goods

⁷¹ Eltis and Engerman 1993, p. 310.

⁷² Thornton 1980, pp. 422-423.

⁷³ Eltis and Engerman 1993, p. 310.

⁷⁴ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 27 June 2011].

⁷⁵ Klein 1972, pp. 903-904, 915.

in exchange for slaves. The most desired imported goods in eighteenth-century Central Africa were textiles. Most of the textiles arriving in the slaving ports came from Asia. Ferreira has demonstrated that the imports of Indian textiles to Luanda were linked to trading networks that included Portugal, Brazil and Asia. The *Carreira da India* was the maritime route between Lisbon and Indian ports, operated by vessels (*Naus da India*) which sailed on voyages that could take up to one and a half years. These vessels often made stopovers in Brazil and Africa on their lengthy voyages. The stopovers played a pivotal role in the growth of Indian textile smuggling. *Naus da India* stopped not only in Luanda, but frequently in Salvador as well by the end of the seventeenth century. Salvador became much more important than Lisbon in the Indian textile trade. Textiles spread from Bahia to other Atlantic cities, primarily Rio de Janeiro and Luanda. Benguela merchants were not excluded from participation in this network. *Naus da India* occasionally called at Benguela and most of the cargo on Brazilian ships sailing to Benguela consisted of Indian textiles. According to Ferreira, Asian textiles were the primary goods used to conduct business in Benguela and the interior during the eighteenth century.⁷⁶

Africans sought Indian textiles because they were important in terms of fashion and prestige. Another item widely traded in Benguela was *missangas* (beads), where they were used as a currency. Africans wore them as adornments to display wealth and prestige, as well as affiliation to powerful patrons.⁷⁷ Brazilian traders in Benguela also sold gunpowder in exchange for slaves despite regulations prohibiting the use of weapons and gunpowder in Angola. Ferreira has shown that, in 1800, 583 barrels of gunpowder were imported to Benguela and 267 barrels were sent to the interior.⁷⁸ Brazilian alcohol, especially sugar cane brandy called *gerebita*, was widely used in trading for slaves in West Central Africa. The alcohol trade reached great heights in Luanda during the eighteenth century but the imports never reached such levels in Benguela.⁷⁹ Goods imported from all over Europe included numerous small items such as hats, socks, glasses, cups, cutlery and scissors, as well as foodstuffs.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Ferreira 2003, pp. 48-68, 77, 115-121. On India fleets and their stopovers in Brazil, see also Boxer 1973, p. 222.

⁷⁷ Ferreira 2003, p. 114.

⁷⁸ Ferreira 2003, p. 115.

⁷⁹ Curto 2002 and 2004.

⁸⁰ Miller 1988, pp. 76-77.

2.6 Processes of Enslavement

Enslavement in West Central Africa, as elsewhere on the continent, was characterized by massive violence. As Paul Lovejoy has written, “[s]lavery was virtually always initiated through violence that reduced the status of a person from a condition of freedom and citizenship to a condition of slavery.”⁸¹ The most common ways of capturing slaves were through warfare, slave-raiding, and kidnapping. Other means of capturing hapless individuals included the contortion of court proceedings to enslave people for violating trivial rules of society, witchcraft accusations that led to the enslavement of people accused of illicit supernatural activities, tribute exactions from subordinates settled in slaves, and the sale of kin or even self-enslavement particularly during times of famine and epidemics. All these mechanisms contributed to the proliferation of violence and significantly higher levels of insecurity, not only in Central Africa, but throughout the continent as the slave trade expanded.⁸²

Seventeenth-century enslaving in Angola was mostly based on large-scale warfare. The Portuguese sought territorial control over their African neighbors and, in the process, captured as many people as they could. With their African allies and with armies that consisted mainly of African soldiers, the Portuguese were able to capture tens of thousands of people in their military campaigns. For example, between 1617 and 1621, about 50,000 slaves were exported from Luanda, a significant number of them being captured in the wars against the kingdom of Ndongo. Although by the end of the seventeenth century the intensity of the Angola Wars abated, large-scale production of captives did not end. As Curto has shown, Portuguese-commanded forces fought battles against African enemies in the eighteenth century as well. For example, the 1744 campaigns in the Dembo region and against the Kingdom of Matamba yielded some 1,835 captives. In 1761, a small Portuguese army fought against the Hungu people east of Ambaca, seizing about 4,015 individuals. The king of Portugal received one-fifth of the captives captured during any military campaign by the Portuguese. According to Curto, “[w]arfare remained far from a trivial mechanism for the production of slaves.”⁸³

Planned attacks were also common in the Benguela hinterland. As Candido has argued, warfare was morally acceptable to both the Portuguese and Africans. The collection of the “royal fifth” indicates that in Portuguese legal tradition, captives taken during a “legitimate” war could be enslaved. Anyone seized in “just wars” could be enslaved, and from time to time, this led aspiring

⁸¹ Lovejoy 2000, p. 3.

⁸² Curto 2008a, pp. 382-383.

⁸³ Curto 2008a, pp. 391. On the contrary, Ferreira 2003, pp. 22-23, has argued that Portuguese military operations in the Luanda hinterland were insignificant for slave production from the mid-1680s onwards.

commanders to exceed their authorities. Commanders of the inland *presídios* needed official permission from the governor before they could attack African sovereigns. According to Candido, captains perpetrated violent acts against the *sobas* of Kiaka, Ganda and Bongo in 1791, against the *soba* of Socoval in 1795, and against the *soba* of Cacombo in 1796, for example. Sometimes the *sobas* complained to the governor of Benguela about these illegal operations. After the 1796 attack, the *soba* of Cacombo even requested that the governor assign new land to his people.⁸⁴

People who were susceptible to capture during the military campaigns included not only male soldiers but also females, who were the major component of the baggage trains following the African armies. If African armies were defeated in the battles, the Portuguese and their allies looted the hamlets, villages, and even cities of the losers, and enslaved unprotected women, children, and older men. The captured men were predominantly destined for export overseas and women for local slave markets. Curto has characterized the 1773-1775 campaigns against Mbailundu on Angola's central plateau as fairly typical. In the mountainous area of Kiyaka, where civilians had sought refuge, more than 500 people, including "females, lads, and old people" fell into the hands of two Portuguese armies and their African partners.⁸⁵

Slave-raiding was a particularly important feature in the central Angolan highlands. This was the case already in the sixteenth century, when the western parts of the central plateau were overrun by Imbangala warriors. Slave-raiding was central to eighteenth-century political consolidation of several important proto-Ovimbundu polities. Prior to being confirmed as a leader of an Umbundu polity, aspiring individuals were required to engage in raids. According to Candido, new *sobas* nominated in Wambu, Ngalangi or Mbailundu had to engage in external raids to seize people. The newly seized slaves were exchanged for ammunition and textiles, allowing the *soba* to pay for the cost of his official installation.⁸⁶ These warlords engaged in raids against their enemies throughout the plateau, but sometimes their operations backfired. For example, in 1755, a potentate of the "Cabunda" nation carried out raids against chiefs in the area of Caconda, who had allied themselves with the Portuguese. A punitive force was sent out from Benguela early the next year to punish the Cabunda potentate. Over 1,500 of his soldiers died in battle, over 500 drowned fleeing across a river, and some 660 of his subjects, mostly women, were enslaved.⁸⁷ Candido has shown that military officials in the interior often portrayed an image of endemic raiding to their superiors in Luanda and Benguela. Under these circumstances, even

⁸⁴ Candido 2006, pp. 51-53, 88.

⁸⁵ Curto 2008a, pp. 391-392.

⁸⁶ Candido 2006, p. 54.

⁸⁷ Curto 2008a, p. 394.

strong political entities, such as the *sobados* of Mbailundu and Ngalangi, were constantly attacking and being attacked.⁸⁸

Large numbers of Central Africans were enslaved through military expeditions and raids, but many people experienced enslavement on a more individual level. Pawnship was one institution that turned free individuals into slaves. In the 1760s, a woman and her daughter, subsequently baptized as Lucrécia, arrived at Luanda in a slave coffle. Lucrécia's mother refused to eat and wept incessantly, eventually succumbing to death. Her grief emanated from the fact that she and her daughter had been pawned by her husband to cover an unspecified debt or fine. Since the treacherous husband had made no efforts to redeem them, the pawns were sold into slavery.⁸⁹

Some people found themselves enslaved for offences they perpetrated. This was the fate, for example, of Dom João Manoel Sylvestre, the nephew of a ruler of a Dembo chiefdom called Gombe Amuquiama, who was caught stealing some trifles from the nearby *soba* of Nambo Angongo. As a punishment, Dom Sylvestre was enslaved, sold and subsequently sent to Luanda. While awaiting shipment he did not claim the privilege of "original freedom" through which the Portuguese Crown sought to protect the unjustly enslaved from bondage. This privilege sometimes resulted in inquiries into the circumstances of enslavement. Those deemed to have been illegally enslaved were given back their freedom. Dom Sylvestre, however, remained enslaved, although his uncle complained to the Governor of Angola about the cruel sentence meted out by the ruler of Nambo Angongo.⁹⁰

People enslaved through judicial mechanisms have left few traces in the Portuguese documentation because this happened under African jurisdiction. According to Candido, some judicial cases in Bihé in the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries were fraudulent, pointing to a thinly disguised mechanism of deliberate enslavement. In the Benguela hinterland, those accused of adultery and witchcraft were sometimes condemned to slavery. "Unfaithful" men, the "seducers", faced slavery and deportation, but condemned women were kept locally. Murderers could also be punished with enslavement. However, as Candido notes, forms of punishment and the mechanisms for determining who was guilty changed over time.⁹¹

Many individuals ended up as slaves through kidnapping. There is no clear line dividing kidnapping from warfare as a method of enslavement, but the scale of operations was usually different. In warfare and slave-raids groups of people were enslaved, whereas in kidnapping captors mainly targeted individuals.

⁸⁸ Candido 2006, p. 59.

⁸⁹ Curto 2008a, p. 401.

⁹⁰ Curto 2008a, pp. 401-402.

⁹¹ Candido 2006, pp. 63-66.

Women, children, and people debilitated by a physical condition were more vulnerable to kidnapping than healthy, adult men.⁹² Kidnapping has left relatively few traces in the documentation. One of the few first-hand accounts recorded in Angola was left by a slave called Anna, whose owner João Pereira da Cunha had been jailed by the Inquisition. Anna was questioned in Lisbon in 1751 about her owner's heterodox religious practices. Her interview started with questions about her origin. Anna, approximately 25 years old at the time of her hearing, said that she had been kidnapped as a small child and did not remember the names of her parents. She recounted that while she had been out playing with other children, a black man named Dominguede had captured her and placed a hand on her mouth, telling her to be silent. Anna was transported to Luanda and sold, but like so many other women, she was retained in Angola as a household slave and never transported to the Americas.⁹³

Kidnapping was also the fate of a 15-year-old male later baptized as Domingos, who was captured near the sources of the Zambezi by local countrymen around 1775. Sold into slavery on the coast, Domingos became the slave valet of Captain João Ignacio Coelho, who captained a vessel transporting slaves from Central Africa to Brazil. While Domingos sailed the Atlantic, one of his abductors along with some of his relatives and associates were enslaved by Domingos' father and eventually embarked as slaves at Benguela to Rio de Janeiro. Reconstructing his new life around theft and crime, one of Domingos' abductors was caught by Portuguese justice in Rio de Janeiro and sentenced to a life of penal servitude in the lighters that plied the city's harbor. It was there that Domingos, most likely still sailing with Captain Coelho, came face to face with his captor some eight years later.⁹⁴

Trickery was often used to enslave people. For example, traders sometimes seized the free porters who had carried their goods from the interior to the coast. In 1789, the governor of Benguela intervened in such a case, when the trader Antônio José da Costa sold the free porters who had carried ivory and bees-wax from Mbailundu to Benguela. In the same year, another trader seized eight people from Mbailundu, claiming that the *soba* owed him money. The traders of Benguela called for the governor's intervention to avoid upsetting commercial relations with the *soba* of Mbailundu who controlled the major markets for slaves, bees-wax and ivory in the central highlands. Pleased with the governor's decision, the *soba* sent 13 slaves and 12 cattle to the governor in 1794. The governor, pleased with the gift, then sent an assortment of imported goods to the *soba* of Mbailundu.⁹⁵

⁹² Candido 2006, pp. 68-69.

⁹³ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 51-51v.

⁹⁴ Miller 1988, pp. 3-4.; Curto 2008a, p. 402.

⁹⁵ Candido 2006, p. 69.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with West Central Africa as an enslavement zone in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database shows that this region was the most important outlet for slaves taken to Brazil. Only during the first three decades did slave exports from the Bight of Benin seriously challenge Central African exports. This was particularly the case during the 1720s, when slave exports from the Bight of Benin surpassed Central African exports, both according to documented and estimated numbers provided by the TSTD. There was, however, a marked difference in Central African slave imports in different Brazilian regions from which slaves were re-exported via land routes to Minas Gerais. Whereas South-east Brazil, particularly Rio de Janeiro, received most of its slave imports from Central Africa, this was not the case in Bahia. The Bight of Benin, except in the 1770s, always provided a greater number of slaves to Bahia than West Central Africa.

An important feature of Central African cultural landscape was the spread of Atlantic Creole culture in the kingdom of Kongo and the Portuguese colony of Angola from the fifteenth to eighteenth century. In Angola, this cultural mixing progressed inland from Luanda with Luso-African traders and European missionaries. An important significance of creolization in Central Africa was that slaves who were taken to the Americas from this region carried knowledge of European culture with them. Some of them arrived in Brazil accustomed to European ways, Portuguese language, and Catholic religious practices. This knowledge gave them a marked advantage in negotiating their new status and establishing their identities in the mining society of Minas Gerais.

3 Angola vs. Mina: The Origins of African Slaves in Minas Gerais

3.1 General Trends in the Growth of the Slave Population

The discovery of gold in the region that would become the *capitania* of Minas Gerais was the result of continuous efforts by explorers from São Paulo to push the colonial frontier further to the interior of Brazil in the second half of the seventeenth century. Settlement began on a more significant scale after the discovery of extensive gold reserves in Ouro Preto (Vila Rica) and Mariana (Ribeirão do Carmo) in the 1690s.¹ The chaotic nature of early settlement and the slow emergence of royal authority made the tasks of imposing taxes and counting inhabitants almost impossible. Rumors of new discoveries sparked movements of people into uncharted, often remote regions of steep mountains and countless rivers.² The continuous presence of slaves brought from Africa characterized these early migrations.

The Portuguese Crown initially sought to limit the rush to the gold deposits. Worried about the labor needs of the sugar-growing regions of Bahia and Pernambuco, the importation of slaves was restricted to 200 a year between 1701 and 1711.³ However, this policy failed as the coastal whites were the first to migrate to the gold region. The first population estimate was published by the Jesuit Antonil, who cited a total population of 30,000 in 1709.⁴ The population history of Minas Gerais has been extensively studied. Because slaves played such a prominent role in the development of the mining region, their numbers are better known for the eighteenth century than the numbers of the rest of the population.⁵ Demographic data originating from various sources, however, should be treated with reservation. The early slave enumerations were made in the principal areas of settlement and gold mining, but miners also settled in regions that were harder to access. As Russell-Wood has noted, figures prior to

¹ I will use the current names for all the cities of Minas Gerais. Ribeirão do Carmo was changed into Mariana in 1745. Ouro Preto is still occasionally referred to as Vila Rica de Ouro Preto. Hereafter, I use Vila Rica to refer to the *comarca* (district) of Vila Rica.

² Bergad 1999, pp. 81-82.

³ Vallejos 1985, p. 9.

⁴ Antonil 2001, p. 243. However, Klein and Luna 2010, p. 36, claim that “[a]s early as 1710 there were probably some 20,000 whites and an equal number of blacks”.

⁵ For demographic overviews of the slave population in the eighteenth century, see Bergad 1999, pp. 82-93; Libby 2007 and 2008.

Table 3.1, Slave population in Minas Gerais, 1716-1720, 1728

Year	Slaves
1716-17	27,909
1717-18	35,094
1718-19	34,939
1719-20	31,500
1728	52,348

Source: Russell-Wood 2002, pp. 110, 231 (n. 16).⁶

the 1776 official census should be considered as estimates rather than accurate records.⁷ The size of the early slave population can be culled from capitation records, which are summarized in Table 3.1.

In this early phase of mining and colonization, slaves were heavily concentrated in Mariana and Ouro Preto. Mariana held the biggest number of enslaved Africans in all years studied by Russell-Wood. Proportionately over 50% of slaves were concentrated in Mariana and Ouro Preto in all years except 1716-17, when these two locations held 47% of the enslaved population. Sabará was the third most important center of mining, followed closely by Caeté (Vila Nova da Rainha). Serro (Vila do Príncipe) in northern Minas Gerais and São João del Rei and São José del Rei in the south-western *comarca* of Rio das Mortes attracted less fortune-hunters and held less slaves. However, Rio das Mortes became increasingly attractive during the 1720s and held 17% of the slave population in 1728, whereas ten years earlier the proportion had been 10%.⁸

Botelho has attempted to estimate the enslaved population of the *capitania* around 1720-21. His estimate was based on fiscal sources that indicated the number of slaves for six major mining centers: Ouro Preto, Mariana, Sabará, São João del Rei, São José del Rei (estimated by Botelho, based on data from 1717), and Pitangui. A notable deficiency in these calculations is the absence of data from Serro. According to Botelho, the slave population of the six locations

⁶ These numbers present the estimated slave populations of Mariana, Ouro Preto, Sabará, São João del Rei, São José del Rei (excepting 1716-17), Caeté, Serro, and Pitangui (excepting 1716-17). Russell-Wood 2002, p. 110, also notes that in 1723 about 53,000 slaves capable of work were registered.

⁷ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 110.

⁸ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 231, n. 16.

Table 3.2, Slave Population of Minas Gerais 1735-1749

Year	Ouro Preto	Mariana	Sabar	Rio das Mortes	Serro Frio	Backlands	Paracat	Totals
1735	20,863	26,892	24,284	14,400	10,102			96,514
1736	20,904	26,752	24,284	14,471	8,988	3,331		98,730
1737	21,405	26,584	23,937	14,716	8,474	2,877		97,993
1738	21,012	26,532	28,082	15,096	8,166	2,719		101,607
1739	20,883	26,545	22,931	15,281	8,216	8,154		102,010
1740	20,667	26,082	22,392	15,301	8,063	2,127		94,632
1741	21,171	26,149	22,495	13,303	8,206	1,498		92,822
1742	21,492	25,491	22,335	15,331	8,123	1,356		94,128
1743	21,673	25,495	22,148	15,380	8,009	1,719		94,424
1744	21,403	24,448	22,146	14,923	7,106	1,349	5,946	97,321
1745	20,168	23,438	20,253	14,420	6,935	1,604	8,548	95,366
1746	19,932	22,891	20,490	13,900	6,952	1,582	7,581	93,328
1747	16,893	21,866	20,919	13,619	6,968	1,085	6,620	87,970
1748	19,162	21,331	20,740	13,584	7,005	1,465	6,412	89,699
1749	18,739	20,539	20,838	13,711	6,980	1,460	6,019	88,286

Source: Cdice Costa Matoso, fols. 181-187 as published in Boxer 1962, Appendix IV, pp. 341-346.

N.B. There were two counts of slaves in all years except 1735. The numbers here are from the first matriculation, except data for “Backlands” in 1741 and Paracat in 1744, which are from the second matriculation.

was between 45,554 and 46,392.⁹ As can be seen, this is much higher than the number indicated by Russell-Wood for 1719-20. Libby has suggested that Botelho’s estimate for So Jos is questionably high (11,120 to 11,958 compared to Russell-Wood’s 1,868 in 1719-20), and this would have affected the result. Libby has also speculated that the slave population might have consisted of about 75,000 individuals in 1728, an estimate considerably higher than Russell-Wood’s figure for that year.¹⁰

The early efforts of taxation included various practices, including sporadic taxes on slaves, and a collection of the *quinto* or royal fifth, an official obligation imposed on all mineral production in 1700. The collection of the *quinto* never functioned effectively because gold was also smuggled from Minas Gerais. Crown officials abandoned their efforts to collect the *quinto* in the second decade of the eighteenth century and replaced it by a yearly fixed

⁹ Botelho 2000.

¹⁰ Libby 2007, pp. 410-411.

weight in gold to be paid by residents of each established district. This schema was never accepted by the miners. In 1735, Crown officials implemented a *capitação*, or head tax on each slave. By this time, the *mineiro* slave population had risen to over 96,000, thus almost doubling during seven years. The *capitação* was collected until 1750, and it required regularized slave censuses. The twice-yearly slave censuses from 1735 to 1749 show the growth and decline of the slave population in different locations of the *capitania*. According to the censuses, the adult slave population peaked in 1739 with 102,010 individuals – slave children were not included on the tax lists. During the 1740s, the slave population declined gradually, dropping to 88,286 in 1749.

During the fifteen years of *capitação*, the slave population was heavily concentrated in the areas where the earliest gold strikes of the late seventeenth century had occurred. Nearly half of the adult slaves counted in the censuses lived in and around the cities of Ouro Preto and Mariana. When the slaves from Sabará are added to these figures, the proportion rises to over 70%. A great majority of the slave population was thus concentrated within a hundred kilometer radius, at least until the 1740s. Other significant concentrations of slaves were found in the *comarca* of Rio das Mortes, in the vicinity of the cities of São João del Rei and São José del Rei, where approximately 15% of the slaves lived. Slaves were also employed in northern Minas Gerais in the *comarca* of Serro do Frio, largely because of diamond discoveries. Less than 10% of adult slaves lived in Serro. In the northwest of the captaincy, diamond and gold reserves in Paracatú attracted fortune seekers from the 1740s onward, but less than 10% of the slave population labored there during the final years of the head tax collection.¹¹

Slave masters probably attempted to understate the number of slaves they owned because a substantial tax was levied on each adult slave. Fraud was easier in areas where royal authority was not as well established as in major urban centers. From a demographic perspective, the census lists are problematic because they do not reveal the extent of the free population nor data on sex ratios and age structure. Thus, the proportion of slaves in the total population is impossible to ascertain. However, Bergad has suggested an estimate based on a total of 226,666 inhabitants indicated for 1751. The adult slave population of 1749 (88,286 individuals) would thus have been roughly 39% of the total population indicated for 1751. Bergad has assumed that slaves made up to between 40% and 50% of all inhabitants in the years of regular slave censuses between 1735 and 1749.¹² He has also argued that whites were always the smallest racial group in Minas Gerais, “probably never more than 20% of the total population

¹¹ Bergad 1999, pp. 85-86.

¹² Bergad 1999, p. 87. There is no documentation to back up this estimate, but similar proportions are suggested by the 1786 census which took into account both free and enslaved populations.

throughout the eighteenth century.”¹³ This would mean that the proportion of the free colored population was always at least about 30%. Although this was indeed the case evidenced by the 1786 census, it is doubtful that the proportion of free colored was as high in the first half of the eighteenth century. The free colored population grew through manumissions as the century progressed but, as Russell-Wood has noted, the number of *forros* included in the tax lists did not exceed 1.4% in any year between 1735 and 1749.¹⁴ This could mean that the proportions of enslaved blacks and/or white people were higher than the one suggested by Bergad, for example 60% black and enslaved, 20% white and 20% free colored.¹⁵

Despite their limitations, the demographic data clearly show that the population of Minas Gerais was predominantly black and African in the first half of the eighteenth century. This had a marked effect on the area’s popular culture, as later chapters of this work will argue. Another effect of such composition of the population was the constant fear of slave revolts.¹⁶ White slave owners were always in the minority as black slaves made up the majority of the population. Moreover, the majority of the slaves were concentrated in the vicinity of a few important mining centers within a relatively small area. Slave control was difficult in the mountainous and rugged terrain of the *capitania*.¹⁷ As Russell-Wood has noted, the presence of large numbers of inadequately supervised slaves in proximity to major towns constituted a constant threat to the enforcement of law and order. Slaves also enjoyed great physical mobility that exacerbated the fear among white people.¹⁸ Seen from a demographic perspective, the fear was well-founded.

The census reports of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries offer more reliable figures on the Minas Gerais population. The first *capitania*-wide census in 1776 included the figures for the *comarcas* of Vila Rica, Rio das Mortes, Sabará and Serro do Frio. To these figures Bergad has added the population counted in the district of Minas Novas in the *comarca* of Serro do Frio, revising the total population from 319,769 to 341,869.¹⁹ The 1776 census divided the population into three color categories – whites, *pardos*

¹³ Bergad 1999, p. 93.

¹⁴ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 111.

¹⁵ Botelho 2000, p. 17, in his estimate of the population around 1720 has argued that it is plausible to say that the free population represented 40% of the total population. Of course, the proportion of white people in the early phases of mining might have been higher than the 20% suggested by Bergad.

¹⁶ On the fear of slave revolts, see Lima 2008.

¹⁷ Vallejos 1985.

¹⁸ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 110.

¹⁹ See Bergad 1996, p. 899. The original manuscript has not been located but the 1776 census (excluding Minas Novas), “Taboa dos Habitantes da Capitania de Minas Geraes, e dos Nascidos e Falecidos no Anno de 1776,” is published in Rocha 1897, p. 511.

Table 3.3, Population of Minas Gerais by racial and legal category 1786-1808

	1786	%	1805	%	1808	%
Whites	65,664	16.7	78,035	19.2	106,684	24.6
Free <i>pardos</i>	80,309	20.4	92,049	22.6	129,656	29.9
Free blacks	42,739	10.9	48,139	11.8	47,937	11.1
Total Free colored	123,048	31.3	140,188	34.4	177,593	41.0
Enslaved <i>pardos</i>	20,376	5.2	24,997	6.1	15,737	3.6
Enslaved blacks	153,759	39.1	163,784	40.2	133,035	30.7
Total slaves	174,135	44.2	188,781	46.4	148,772	34.4
Indians & Unidentified	30,851	7.8				
Total population	393,698	100	407,004	100	433,049	100

Source: “População da Província de Minas Geraes,” *Revista do Archivo Publico Mineiro*, 4:2 (1899), pp. 294-295.

(mixed), and blacks – but did not indicate slave or free population data. The people in different color categories were listed by sex for each *comarca*. The 1786 and 1805 censuses used the same color divisions for men and women and also divided the population by legal status into slave and free. However, these population counts did not list the population by *comarca*.²⁰ The 1808 census divided the population into slave and free and listed these categories by color and sex. The spatial dimension of the census was achieved by dividing the four *comarcas* into 14 municipal districts (*termos*). These censuses point to some important changes in the population between 1776 and 1808.

As can be seen from Table 3.3, the number of slaves and their proportion in the total population continued to rise from 1786 to 1805, but then declined sharply between 1805 and 1808. This can only be explained by outward migration away from Minas Gerais between 1805 and 1808, because the number of free blacks did not increase at the same time. The fall in the number of enslaved *pardos* can be explained by manumission. Until 1805, slaves made up well over 40% of the population with the majority of the enslaved population being black, including slaves imported from Africa but increasingly Brazilian-born *crioulos/as*. One must also note the substantial free colored population, which made up well over 30% of the population, and over 40% by 1808. The white population grew throughout the period from 1786 to 1808 both absolutely and proportionately. However, the highest rise can be observed in the free *pardo* population.

²⁰ “População da Província de Minas Geraes,” *Revista do Archivo Publico Mineiro*, 4:2 (1899), p. 294. The original manuscript of the 1786 census has not been located.

Table 3.4, Population of Minas Gerais by 1776 administrative divisions, 1776-1808

	1776	%	1808	%
Vila Rica (1776 boundaries)	78,618	23.0	72,286	16.7
Rio das Mortes (1776 boundaries)	82,781	24.2	154,869	35.8
Sabará (1776 boundaries)	99,576	29.1	135,920	31.4
Serro do Frio (1776 boundaries)	80,894	23.7	69,974	16.2
Total population	341,869	100	433,049	100

Source: Bergad 1996, p. 902.

One distinctive feature of the *mineiro* population was that it was dominated by colored people throughout the eighteenth century. As Russell-Wood has written, “[p]erhaps in no other region of colonial Brazil did persons of African origin so outnumber whites.”²¹ In 1808, approximately a quarter of the population was white. Because there are no data prior to 1776 on the total population of the *capitania*, it is impossible to estimate how the proportion of white people changed over time. In 1776, 22.2% of the population, or 75,800 out of 341,869, was white. Comparing this to the 1786 figure of 65,664 individuals, it can be discerned that there were considerable fluctuations in the white population. What is striking, however, is the number of both enslaved and free blacks in the society. In the 1776 census, blacks made up 52.1% of the population (178,212 individuals). Similar trends continued in 1786 and 1805, when blacks constituted 50.0% and 52.0% of the population respectively. By 1808, their proportion in the population had sunk to 41.8%.

Although the Mineiro slave population became increasingly Brazilian-born towards the end of the eighteenth century – a process that is discussed below – such proportions of blacks in the total population had marked effects on cultural life in the *capitania* of Minas Gerais.²² When it is taken into account that over a quarter of the population was mixed-color, descending from both European and African ancestors, it is not surprising that cultural development in the region was characterized by creolization. Of course, population data cannot be used to argue that at least 50% of the cultural elements in the resulting creole culture were derived from African cultures. Such quantification would not make sense and would be impossible to measure. However, demographic data can be useful in understanding why certain African cultural practices became pervasive in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais.

²¹ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 111.

²² Aguiar 1999; Paiva 2001.

Census data also point to important geographical changes in the population as can be observed in Table 3.4. Whereas in 1776 population was still rather evenly distributed between the four *comarcas*, by 1808 population had decreased in the *comarcas* of Vila Rica and Serro do Frio. As a site of the original gold strikes, the area of Vila Rica had drawn settlers in the early eighteenth century, but as gold mines were depleted and the soil exhausted because of the slash-and-burn agricultural system, population growth stagnated. Although Serro do Frio experienced contraction in the population between 1776 and 1808, by the 1821 census it had revived and continued to attract new settlers. The most striking population growth was experienced in the south-western *comarca* of Rio das Mortes, where the population almost doubled between 1776 and 1808. Available farming land, soil fertility, and the potential for developing commercialized agricultural activities and animal raising attracted migrants to this old mining zone. Rio das Mortes had important economic links with the markets of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro that fueled the growth of this area of Minas Gerais.²³

The census takers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries did not record the birthplace of individuals although they classified people by color and legal status. Other sources, such as inventories and testaments, can be used to assess the relative proportions of African- and Brazilian-born slaves. Using data gleaned from these sources, Bergad has shown that a steady process of Brazilianization²⁴ took place among *mineiro* slaves during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although the number of women among the slaves imported from Africa was low, they bore children in Brazil that gradually led to the growth of the colored population, either slave or free. In Bergad's large inventory-derived sample, Brazilian-born slaves were the majority by 1795. It is clear that African slaves continued to arrive in Minas Gerais after this date, and at some periods they increased in number relative to Brazilian-born slaves, but they were in the minority throughout the nineteenth century.²⁵

There were some regional variations regarding the timing of increases in the Brazilian-born slave population. According to Bergad, in the *comarca* of Rio das Mortes, the numbers of Brazilian-born slaves increased consistently from as early as the 1730s. The proportions were nearly equal by the mid-1770s, and after 1795 the majority of slaves recorded in the inventories had been born in Brazil. Similar trends were evident in Mariana and Ouro Preto, where Brazilian-born slaves were more numerous than Africans by 1795. In the *comarca* of

²³ Bergad 1999, pp. 96-99.

²⁴ In Portuguese, the term *crioulização* (i.e. creolization) is generally used to denote this demographic process, because the Brazilian-born slaves were called *crioulos/as* in the documentary sources. However, as the term creolization is used in a cultural sense in this study, the term Brazilianization is employed to denote the process in which the slave population became increasingly Brazilian-born.

²⁵ Bergad 1999, pp. 123-126.

Serro do Frio, however, Africans remained the majority of slaves through the early years of the nineteenth century, and Brazilian-born slaves became the majority in the 1820s, significantly later than in southern Minas Gerais. Bergad has argued that the continued importation of African-born slaves to Diamantina was due to the continued economic strength of the regional mining economy in the late eighteenth century, even when mining had declined elsewhere in the Minas Gerais. However, African slaves were imported to Diamantina in fairly small numbers compared to the total slave population.²⁶

The distribution of slave ownership was influenced by the Crown policy of reserving the well-defined mining sites for their discoverers and for miners who held twelve or more slaves. In certain clearly delineated gold fields, such as those in the environs of Ouro Preto and Mariana, heavy concentration of slaves made slave control easier and provided for stability comparable to a controlled plantation environment. Miners with fewer than twelve slaves were allowed to get smaller claims proportional to the number of slaves they possessed, but most of these tended to concentrate on itinerant prospecting, which meant extraordinary freedom for their few slaves. According to Klein and Luna, probably half the miners and a quarter of the slaves were itinerant prospectors scattered along river sites throughout the captaincy of Minas Gerais. Whereas the formal mine works, the *lavras*, employed large numbers of slaves under close supervision, itinerant slave miners and prospectors known as *faiscadores* went unsupervised and spent considerable time away from their masters in return for a fixed amount of gold dust they delivered to their masters. In some cases these *faiscadores* received a wage in gold for their services and gradually worked towards buying their freedom.²⁷

Wealth was unevenly distributed in the mining region and the majority of the *mineiro* population never owned slaves.²⁸ A third or more of the households in the towns of Minas Gerais owned slaves. The majority of slave owners held five or fewer slaves, especially in the early phases of mining prosperity in the 1710s and 1720s.²⁹ Paiva's study of testaments and postmortem inventories for the *comarcas* of Rio das Mortes (1716-1789) and Rio das Velhas (1720-1784) shows that, of 680 slave owners, 295 or 43.3% owned from 1 to 5 slaves, accounting for 12.8% of slaves in these districts. As 23.3% of the owners held from 6 to 10 slaves, altogether, 66.6% of the slave owners held 10 slaves or less. The largest proportion of slaves, 25.7%, was concentrated among 63 owners who held between 21 and 40 slaves. Slave owners who held more than 41 slaves numbered only 19 (2.7%) but they owned a fifth of the total

²⁶ Bergad 1999, pp. 128-130.

²⁷ Klein and Luna 2010, pp. 43-45.

²⁸ For a study of the poor in this region, see Souza 2004.

²⁹ Klein and Luna 2010, pp. 45-46, Tables 3.5 and 3.6.

number of slaves. Median slave holding in these *comarcas* was 10,4, which can be considered low compared to sugar plantation zones in north-east Brazil.³⁰

3.2 Origins of African Slaves in Minas Gerais

The origins, both African and American, of New World slaves have come under increasing scrutiny as studies of the “Black Atlantic” have proliferated since the mid-1990s.³¹ Such studies, however, are not new, as far as Brazil is concerned. The origins and consequent cultural variations among the Black population had already been discussed in such early works as Nina Rodrigues’ *Os Africanos no Brasil* and Arthur Ramos’ *O Negro Brasileiro*, which devoted much attention to contemporary black culture.³² The African origins of the slave population in Minas Gerais have been studied thoroughly since the 1970s, first by demographic historians of São Paulo such as Iraci del Nero da Costa and Francisco Vidal Luna.³³ This was followed by the economic and demographic history of Minas Gerais by Laird Bergad,³⁴ and most recently the unpublished master’s thesis of Rodrigo Castro Rezende and the article by Libby.³⁵

For a long time, the question of African origins of slaves in Minas Gerais has been dominated by the general view that West African slaves from the Mina Coast dominated the *mineiro* slave population in the first half of the eighteenth century.³⁶ The term ‘Mina’ was complex. It originally referred to the Portuguese fort of São Jorge da Mina (later corrupted to Elmina), located in modern Ghana, that was established in 1482. Originally, the coast from the fort east to the Volta River was designated as the Mina Coast, but this area soon came to be known as the Gold Coast by Europeans. By the eighteenth century, the Mina Coast referred to the stretch of coast east from the Volta River as far as the Niger River delta. The British called it the Slave Coast, while in Portuguese it was called the *Costa da Mina*. Originally of little interest to the Portuguese, it came to be important for the Bahian slave traders towards the end of the seventeenth century.³⁷ In the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, this corresponds with the region of the Bight of Benin.

Embarkation ports frequented by the Bahian traders on the Mina Coast included Little Popo, Great Popo, Ardra, Whydah, Porto Novo, Jacquin,

³⁰ Paiva 2001, pp. 130-134.

³¹ The idea of a “Black Atlantic” was proposed in Gilroy 1993. The term provoked a multidisciplinary debate and has been adopted by historians and social scientists alike.

³² Rodrigues 1932; Ramos 1937.

³³ These studies are collected in Luna, Costa and Klein 2009.

³⁴ Bergad 1999.

³⁵ Rezende 2006; Libby 2008.

³⁶ Boxer 1962, p. 175; Russell-Wood 2002, p. 113.

³⁷ Verger 1976, p. 11; Law 1991, pp. 13-14; Graham 2011, p. 3.

Badagry, Epe, and Lagos. However, in the TSTD, the great majority of slaves taken from the Bight of Benin to Bahia are listed simply as originating from the *Costa da Mina*.³⁸ It is not currently possible to confidently identify the exact locations from which West Africans going to Minas Gerais were captured. The kingdom of Dahomey and the Oyo Empire, including many city states, were the most powerful actors in this enslavement zone in the eighteenth century. The majority of slaves were Gbe- or Yoruba-speakers and probably came from within two or three hundred kilometers of the coast.³⁹ However, as Law has noted, it is questionable whether ships from Brazil embarking slaves on the *Costa da Mina* actually took all their human cargo from the Slave Coast. A small proportion of the slaves taken to Brazil from the “Mina Coast” probably came from the eastern Gold Coast.⁴⁰

The Mina Coast could not respond to the demand of slaves in the Brazilian mining regions alone. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the majority of slaves arrived from West Central Africa, and as mining activities stagnated, these Bantu slaves were increasingly employed in agricultural activities. The recent studies by Bergad and Rezende have ascertained this generalization as valid. Bergad also sought to document when the shift from West African dominance to a Central African majority occurred.⁴¹ However, this generalization tends to treat the *capitania* of Minas Gerais as a homogenous area, while it may be assumed that there must have been internal differences depending on geographical position within the *capitania*.

Although studies of the demographic composition of the slave population have become commonplace in recent research, few Brazilian historians have sought to interpret or decrypt what the different African identities listed in various sources meant to the slaves themselves. For example, Luna and Costa, who pioneered the demographic studies of the *mineiro* slave population, tended to divide slaves into the “Sudanese” and the “Bantu” with little concern for internal divisions and differences within these groups.⁴² Bergad, who analyzed the origins of slaves found in property inventories, presented his data in a single table that spanned from 1715 to 1888 (see below, Table 3.5). Bergad, moreover, deemed that African identities found in these sources were meaningless and unimportant by claiming that the slave owners’ practice of adding a “surname” referring to African regions to the slaves’ Portuguese or Christian name – for example, João Congo, Maria Angola, or Antonio Mina – does not reveal the actual ethnicity of slaves. Bergad claimed that these were

³⁸ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 3 July 2011].

³⁹ Reis and Mamigonian 2004; Mann 2010, p. 35; Graham 2011, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Law 2005, pp. 249-251.

⁴¹ Bergad 1999, pp. 151-152; Rezende 2006.

⁴² The relevant articles of Costa and Luna are now collected into one volume. Luna, Costa, and Klein 2009.

“Portuguese-created conceptions of African realities, which may not have been reference points for Africans themselves.” Bergad then argued that “‘Angola’ does not suggest any cultural homogeneity or affinity between slaves appearing with that surname.”⁴³ While Bergad was partially right in suggesting that such general terms as Angola, Congo and Mina do not reveal the enslaved person’s actual birthplace, his argument that slaves from the same region in Africa did not share a similar cultural background is untenable and shows no concern for African historical dynamics. On the contrary, it can be argued that the African background was not meaningless after the slaves arrived in Minas Gerais, although for many slave masters these meanings remained hidden.

Using a similar set of sources as Bergad but for a geographically and chronologically more limited area, Higgins studied the origins of slaves in Sabará. She showed that West African slaves from the Mina Coast were in the majority during the period between 1725 and 1759, but Central Africans were the most numerous group from 1760 to 1808. Interestingly, Higgins listed only three Central African designations of origin. These were Congo/Angola and Monjollo.⁴⁴ It is not clear whether Higgins’ Congo/Angola included slaves designated as Benguela, which was the major origin detected by Bergad for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although Higgins’ analysis was exemplary in that it took into account chronological variations, it can be argued that the number of slaves found in the inventories she studied was quite small, totaling only 990 individuals.

In contrast to earlier studies, Rezende took relations between Brazil and Africa as the starting point for his study and tried to understand how these relations affected the formation of African identities in Minas Gerais. This study was far more nuanced than Bergad’s or Higgins’ and took into account various local differences as well as the shaping of the slave population over time. Rezende effectively showed that the generalization of West African domination in the first half of the eighteenth century does not hold in all locations of the *capitania*, although as a general rule it usually applies. His work confirmed that, as the eighteenth century progressed, enslaved Africans tended to originate increasingly from West Central Africa and the proportion of slaves born in Brazil increased. When these shifts occurred depended largely on the geographic configurations of the slave trade and on the connections that different areas in Minas Gerais had to the coastal ports of Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁵

⁴³ Bergad 1999, pp. 149-150.

⁴⁴ Higgins 1999, pp. 73-75.

⁴⁵ Rezende 2006.

Table 3.5, Origins of African slaves in inventories, 1715-1888

		Males	%	Females	%	Totals	%
Central	Benguela	7,972	27.7%	1,744	31.3%	9,716	28.3%
African	Angola	6,923	24.1%	1,287	23.1%	8,210	23.9%
	Congo	3,216	11.2%	441	7.9%	3,657	10.7%
	Rebolo	1,323	4.6%	374	6.7%	1,697	4.9%
	Cabinda	867	3.0%	213	3.8%	1,080	3.1%
	Ganguela	836	2.9%	126	2.3%	962	2.8%
	Casange	652	2.3%	90	1.6%	742	2.2%
	Monjolo	675	2.3%	50	0.9%	725	2.1%
	Cabunda	480	1.7%	41	0.7%	521	1.5%
	Mufumbe/ Mugumbe	382	1.3%	42	0.8%	424	1.2%
	Songa	191	0.7%	20	0.4%	211	0.6%
	Camunda	101	0.4%	7	0.1%	108	0.3%
Sub-total		23,618	82.1%	4,435	79.7%	28,053	81.7%
West African	Mina	2,769	9.6%	824	14.8%	3,593	10.5%
	Nago	272	0.9%	29	0.5%	301	0.9%
	Cobu	220	0.8%	19	0.3%	239	0.7%
	Courano	139	0.5%	23	0.4%	162	0.5%
	Cabo Verde	139	0.5%	20	0.4%	159	0.5%
Sub-total		3,539	12.3%	915	16.4%	4,454	13.0%
East African	Mozambique	773	2.7%	99	1.8%	872	2.5%
Other	Others	829	2.9%	119	2.1%	948	2.8%
Totals		28,759	100.0%	5,568	100.0%	34,327	100.0%

Source: Bergad 1999, p. 151, Table 4.2.⁴⁶

Bergad's long-term statistics presented in Table 3.5 point to the predominance of Central Africans in the *mineiro* society. In post-mortem inventories between 1715 and 1888, Bergad specified 18 African "nations" among 34,327 slaves listed. The use of inventories as sources for the constitution of the slave population can rightly be criticized because they offer only a partial listing of slaves in a particular location at a certain point in time, but Bergad's listing can be used as an allusive starting point. The biggest problem of these statistics lies in the long time-span that does not help in understanding how the origins of African slaves changed over time.

⁴⁶ I have modified the spelling of some names to correspond the terms used elsewhere in this study. Thus, Bergad's Banguela becomes Benguela, and Gonguela becomes Ganguela. Terms used by Bergad reflect those used in original sources, although different variants were often used to denote same terms. For example, Benguela could be spelled Banguela, Bangella, or Benguela.

When considered from a regional perspective, it can be observed that West Central Africa was the most important exporting region from where slaves were brought to Minas Gerais. Over 80% of both male and female Africans originated in this region. Benguela was the major origin recorded in the inventories, followed closely by Angola. These two designations referred to slaves that embarked on the Middle Passage in Benguela and in Luanda (also known as the “city of Angola”) respectively. The proportion of Benguelas, Angolas and Congos in the African-born population was about 60%. Of West Africans, those denominated as Mina presented 10.5%, while overall West Africans presented 13.0% of the African-born enslaved persons. There were considerable differences in the sex ratios among these groups. The sex ratio among Mina slaves was 336 males per 100 females, whereas among the Congo it rose to 729 males per 100 females. The sex ratio was lower overall among West African adult slaves (387 men per 100 women) than among Central Africans (533 men per 100 women), confirming the data on sex ratios presented in Chapter 2. Among the African-born slaves, the composite sex ratio according to inventory data was approximately five to one, which meant that most men were left without marriage partners born in Africa.

Most West Africans arrived in Minas Gerais in the first half of the eighteenth century. Bergad’s data show that Mina slaves had lost ground to Angolas by the 1740s. If Angolas and Benguelas are added together, however, the shift to a Central African majority might have occurred even earlier. Angola was the largest African “nation” in Minas Gerais between 1740 and 1780, and Benguela predominated from 1780 until 1840, when there was a final surge in slaves citing Congo as their origin.⁴⁷ The proportions observed by Bergad in Minas Gerais reflect the shifting importance of different areas within West Central Africa as sources of slaves. While Luanda remained important throughout the eighteenth century, Benguela exported slaves in almost equal numbers by the 1770s. In the nineteenth century, areas north of Luanda experienced a surge in the number of slave exports. The predominance of Central Africans in the slave population surely explains the prevalence of Central African place names recorded in the state of Minas Gerais in the twentieth century⁴⁸ as well as the preservation into the twenty-first century of a Central African “secret language” called Calunga with profuse Bantu elements in the rural city of Patrocínio.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Bergad 1999, pp. 151-152, Figure 4.10.

⁴⁸ Senna 1924, p. 206. Obviously, place names such as Angola, Benguela and Loanda originated in Central Africa, and the list can be extended with Bengo, Cabinda, Calúnga, Cassange, Catumbéla, Congo, Dânde, Kissâma, Loango, Massangano, etc.

⁴⁹ Byrd 2005.

Luna and Costa sought in their early studies to show that the West African, or what they called Sudanese, presence in Minas Gerais was marked in the eighteenth century. They argued against a generalized notion that Bantus, including both Central and Eastern Africans, had composed the black population of Brazil. This notion had originated in the early nineteenth century in the work of German travelers Spix and Martius who also stayed in Minas Gerais. At the time of their stay in Brazil Central Africans were arriving in the country in larger numbers, especially in Rio de Janeiro.⁵⁰ Luna and Costa studied baptism and burial records in the parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Antônio Dias in Vila Rica.⁵¹ Baptism records are problematic as sources to study the origins of Africans because a majority of Central Africans were already baptized before embarking from Luanda or Benguela.⁵² Burial records are a more reliable source, and show that in this parish West Africans were the majority in the period 1719-1793. At least among the people who died in this parish, West Africans held out much longer than the data presented by Bergad suggest.

Luna and Costa also studied the origins of Africans as listed in the head tax records of 1718. They concentrated on three population nuclei: Pitangui, Itatiaia and São João del Rei. Of the individual African “nations”, slaves of Mina provenance were the most numerous (571 individuals or 34.0% of the total of 1,679), but Bantus or Central Africans – if 40 Mozambique slaves out of a sample of 1,679 individuals are deducted – were proportionately the major group, representing 55.6% of the African-born slaves, while West Africans made up 42.0%. Benguela (19.7%), Angola (12.6%) and Congo (11.7%) were the major Central African origins, followed by Monjolo and Massangano. Luna and Costa’s data from Pitangui between 1718 and 1723 suggests, however, that West Africans, and especially Mina slaves, were becoming more popular in the early 1720s. This corresponds with the surge on slave export from the Bight of Benin in the 1720s (see Graphs 2.1 and 2.2). The number of Mina in Pitangui grew from 77 in 1718 to 294 in 1723. The proportion of West Africans grew from 44.6% to 49.8% within this period. Congo was the most popular Central African “nation” in Pitangui, thus negating Bergad’s suggestion that Congo slaves became more numerous only in the nineteenth century.⁵³ This suggests that there were always localized ebbs and flows in the origins of enslaved Africans within the different enslavement zones.

⁵⁰ Spix and Martius 1824, vol. I, p. 177.

⁵¹ Luna and Costa 2009, pp. 20-23.

⁵² Cf. Libby 2008.

⁵³ Luna and Costa 2009, pp. 28-29, Tables 7 and 8.

Table 3.6, Relative number of slaves by origin, early eighteenth century

		Vila Rica (1718)	Pitangui (1718-1724)	São João del Rei (1719)
Central Africa	Angola	12.01	7.67	13.04
	Benguela	8.85	8.27	14.13
	Congo	4.15	13.28	7.34
	Others	3.36	10.5	5.7
Sub-total		28.37	39.72	40.21
West Africa	Mina	56.69	32.84	17.93
	Others	5.02	7.03	1.9
Sub-total		61.71	39.87	19.83
East Africa	Mozambique	1.26	1.67	0.82
Brazil	Indians	0.59	6.35	3.8
	Crioulos	2.51	4.55	4.62
	Mestiços	0.98	4.57	0
Sub-total		4.08	15.47	8.42
Unknown	Other nations	1.09	0.49	0.82
Undetermined	Not defined	3.44	2.77	29.35
Total		100	100	100

Source: Rezende 2006, p. 80 Table 1, p. 90 Table 2.⁵⁴

Although the proportions of West and West Central Africans in the *capitações* were more or less equal and showed that Central Africans were slightly more numerous, Luna and Costa concluded that “the Sudanese element seems to have been preponderant in the peak period of gold mining”.⁵⁵ While this was true for major gold mining centers such as Vila Rica, in other localities Africans were drawn equally from West and West Central African ports. However, their study also suggests that while in the second decade of the eighteenth century the numbers were still more or less equal, the absolute number as well as the proportion of West Africans rose in the 1720s. Similarly, Table 3.6 based on Rezende’s work shows that there were big differences within the *capitania* depending on the actual location.

⁵⁴ For Pitangui, I have moved Rezende’s category “Reinol” (0.11) or African slaves coming with their owners from Portugal to “Other nations”.

⁵⁵ Luna and Costa 2009, p. 30.

Although West African slaves were more numerous in the total slave population at least until the 1730s, there were considerable differences in the proportions of African “nations” within the *capitania*. In some localities, the scales shifted to a Central African majority earlier, while in other places West Africans remained dominant longer. A good illustration of this tendency is the case of São João del Rei in 1719, as analyzed by Rezende. There, the proportion of Central Africans was 40%, while West Africans accounted for less than 20%. However, the proportion of slaves whose origin was not identified was unusually high, almost 30%. São João del Rei’s proximity to Rio de Janeiro was undoubtedly reflected in these numbers.⁵⁶ One must note the high proportion of Benguelas in this location, surpassing the Angolas in number. Although at this point Benguelas were still in many cases shipped first to Luanda before being taken to Brazil, data from São João del Rei shows that the Benguela merchants were quick to seize the opportunity when the demand for slaves rose in the early eighteenth century with the gold boom in Minas Gerais.⁵⁷

Vila Rica in 1718, also analyzed by Rezende, was more in line with the usual generalization that West Africans dominated the early trade to Minas Gerais. Rezende found that over 60% of slaves in Vila Rica were identified as West Africans, with the Mina “nation” dominating. Central Africans represented about 30% of the slave population and were clearly in the minority. In some localities, slaves were drawn from different regional origins in approximately equal numbers. This was the case in Pitangui between 1718 and 1724, where the proportion of both West Africans and Central Africans was about 40% each. However, the largest “nation” in Pitangui’s case was still the Mina, with 32%, while the proportion of the biggest Central African “nation”, Congo, was 13%.⁵⁸ As can be seen from the data presented by Rezende, the generalization that Mina slaves constituted the majority of slaves in the first half of the eighteenth century does not hold true for all localities. In some cases, Central Africans were the majority, while in other cases West Africans and Central Africans were present in approximately equal numbers.

As Rezende has suggested, these regional differences were due to the links that the interior areas had with the coastal ports. As discussed in the preceding chapter, Bahian ports received most of their slaves from the Bight of Benin throughout the eighteenth century. Bahian ports had strong ties to the northern areas of Minas Gerais, which explains the high number of West African, mainly Mina, slaves in the diamond-mining settlements in the *comarca* of Serro do Frio. *Mineiros* bought slaves in Bahia and re-exported them to the interior for this was the most feasible option available to masters engaged in

⁵⁶ Rezende 2006, p. 80.

⁵⁷ Ferreira 2003, pp. 70-103, contextualizes the early Benguela trade.

⁵⁸ Rezende 2006, pp. 80, 90.

diamond-mining and residing in Serro. Central African slaves also landed in Minas Gerais through this northern network, although in smaller numbers than West Africans. For example, Ambaca's former Captain-Major João Pereira da Cunha sold a female slave called Antonia to a *mineiro* in Salvador in the late 1740s while he was being transported as a prisoner from Angola to Lisbon to be questioned by the Inquisition.⁵⁹

The predominance of West African slaves in Serro do Frio is demonstrated by a nominative list of 1738, compiled at the height of the diamond boom. Among the 7,491 Africans listed, there were 5,912 (almost 79%) West African slaves compared to 1,579 (21%) Central Africans. West Africans were most commonly identified as Mina (3,241 or 43% of the total), whereas in the case of Central Africans Angola was the most common "nation" (892 individuals or 12%).⁶⁰ Clearly, in northern Minas Gerais Central Africans were outnumbered and had fewer opportunities for establishing networks with each other.

The southern parts of Minas Gerais, on the contrary, were linked to Rio de Janeiro. The *carioca* merchants tended to invest in Luanda and Benguela, a logical step in the southern Atlantic, where ocean currents made sailing from Rio de Janeiro to Angola much faster than to West Africa. These differences are also linked to the chronology of economic development in Minas Gerais. In the second half of the eighteenth century, as mining activities declined, economic activities became concentrated in the south, especially in the *comarca* of Rio das Mortes, where commerce in agricultural products flourished. Thus, over time, links with Rio de Janeiro tightened whereas Bahia's importance as a slave supplier diminished.

A similar geographic logic has been noted by Karasch for the *capitania* of Goiás in the early nineteenth century. In the northern district of Goiás, two thirds of Africans came from West Africa, and were usually identified as Mina. Northern Goiás was linked with the ports of Salvador and Belém. Central Africans were less numerous and less well known to the scribes of the northern *comarca*. However, in the southern *comarca* of Goiás, 62.4% of African slaves were from Central Africa. This reflected the southern district's trade relations with Rio de Janeiro.⁶¹

Rio de Janeiro surpassed Bahia as a supplier of slaves to the mining region at least by 1740. Goulart has presented data on slave imports in Minas

⁵⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 9691, f. 157 and Processo 13836, f. 44. João Pereira da Cunha sold numerous other slaves as well while in Salvador. This move was probably deliberate because at least Antonia, the slave in question, could have later testified against her former master. After being sent to the interior of Brazil, however, there was little chance that the Inquisition would ever have found her.

⁶⁰ Luna 1980, Apêndice estatístico, Tabela AE-11.

⁶¹ Karasch 2002, pp. 137-139.

Gerais between 1739 and 1759 that show Rio de Janeiro's importance for *mineiro* slave owners. In the period 1739-1741 Bahia exported 9,200 slaves to Minas Gerais, while 11,900 slaves came from Rio de Janeiro. While Rio de Janeiro kept up a steady slave supply from 1742 to 1756 with an annual average of 3,760 slaves, Bahia's annual average between 1745 and 1756 was 2,280 individuals. In the three-year period 1757-59, however, even Rio de Janeiro's share dropped to approximately 2,280 slaves.⁶² Bahia's slave trade to Minas Gerais continued to decline during the 1760s, with only 10,081 slaves being transported between the *capitanias*. Thus, Bahia's annual share dropped to approximately 920 slaves.⁶³

The geographic configurations of slave transport to Minas Gerais had a marked effect on how slave masters identified their enslaved African work force. Bahian traders, whose activities were concentrated on the West African coast, were familiar with different groups residing in the coastal areas and could sometimes identify the names of the villages from where the captives hailed or the names of the ethnic groups to which they belonged. Similarly, *carioca* traders who engaged in the trade in slaves in West Central Africa recognized the place names or the ethnonyms cited by these individuals. Consequently, in the nominative lists from northern Minas Gerais there is a wider variety of West African ethnonyms while in the south parts the Central African origins are more numerous.⁶⁴

This point is well illustrated by a nominative list of slaves from Serro Frio in 1738. In a sample of 3,975 slaves, 43 West African ethnonyms were found compared to 22 Central African origins. The most common identity among West Africans was Mina, but there were also individuals who added a specific place name or ethnic group to the term Mina. For example, terms such as Gege Mina, Goriba Mina, and Gago Mina⁶⁵ were cited as places or ethnic groups of origin. Besides being called Minas, West African nations included Courano/Coura, Cobu, Sabarú, Caravari (Calabar), and Fon. There were also two individuals who clearly professed a Muslim identity. They were called Mouros. One of them was of Coura ethnicity, but another was from Algiers. Although Mina was the general term by which slave owners identified the origin of West Africans, there were clearly numerous enslaved individuals who stressed that they had another more precisely defined identity deriving from their place of birth or from the community of which they saw themselves as legitimate members. Similarly,

⁶² Goulart 1949, p. 170.

⁶³ Ribeiro 2006, Tabela 3. According to the estimates in the TSTD, Bahia imported 66,645 enslaved individuals between 1761 and 1770. <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/assessment/estimates.faces> [accessed 3 July 2011].

⁶⁴ Rezende 2006, p. 89.

⁶⁵ Gege referred to Ewe and Fon speakers from Dahomey. I have not been able to identify the meaning of Goriba Mina and Gago Mina. Gago Mina identity is also mentioned in Pinheiro 2006, pp. 119, 164.

among Central Africans, Angola was the predominant term applied to the slaves originating from this region, but a few individuals cited as their identity place names such as Bomba Angola, Cambuta Angola, and Mutumo Angola.⁶⁶

To demonstrate the differences between northern and southern Minas Gerais, the nominal list of 1738 from Serro Frio can be compared to the lists collected in and around Mariana in 1718-19 and 1723. They show that West African identities were far less varied than in Serro Frio. In the 1718-19 listing from Sumidouro, there were only thirteen West African ethnonyms compared to fifteen Central African identities. As expected, West African slaves identified as Mina were the most numerous, constituting 44% of the slave population. Central Africans made up about 37%, the biggest group being Benguela.⁶⁷ However, in the 1723 listing from Mariana there were 19 West African ethnonyms compared to only 9 Central African “nations”.⁶⁸

The geographic setting partially helps one understand how the slaves were identified by their owners. In northern Minas Gerais, slave owners used a variety of West African ethnic or geographical identifiers in conjunction with the slaves’ Christian name. Brazilian merchants on the West African coast and the captains of the slave ships knew, at least in some cases, the actual origins of the slaves they bought. Whether this was recorded in all the records of purchase from the West African coast to the final sale in Brazil is unclear.⁶⁹ However, hypothetically it shows that an African merchant who sold captives to Europeans knew their origins or that some slaves were able to communicate their natal identity at some point to the people holding them captive. Some of them probably spoke Portuguese, learned in commercial activities before being sold into slavery. Another possibility is that the ship captains recognized the “country marks” or facial scarification of Africans from different areas.

The fact that African markers of identity were used in Minas Gerais demonstrates that some slave owners were interested enough in the origins of their slaves to consider these identities to be meaningful. It is not completely impossible that some of these *mineiro* slave owners had earlier experience in the trade, either as captains of slave ships or as partners in financing ships to Africa. In such cases, they probably would have been more intimately acquainted with African geography. One could also think that by identifying someone by their birthplace or home village, slave owners were simply trying to distinguish between all the Joãos and Antonios from the same region. While it is true that masters with large slave holdings could have several slaves with the same name, such as José Mina or Antonio Angola, usually they had a way of distinguishing

⁶⁶ APM, CC, Códice 1068, Matricula de escravos (Serro Frio), 1738.

⁶⁷ APM, CC, Códice 1029, Matricula de escravos empregados na mineração 1718-19 do Sumidouro (Vila do Carmo).

⁶⁸ AHCMM, Códice 166, Lançamento dos Reais Quintos, 1723.

⁶⁹ On Brazilian traders’ activities in West Africa, see Verger 1976.

Table 3.7, Origins of African Slaves in the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas 1713-1793

	1713-1733	1734-1753	1754-1773	1774-1793	Total
Central African	40%	49%	49%	35%	45%
West African	60%	49%	48%	63%	53%
Other Regions	0%	2%	3%	2%	2%

Source: Santos & Correa 2008, 289, Tabela 6.

these by physical characteristics, such as young/old or small/big. For example, in the 1738 Serro do Frio matriculation, one owner, who held four slaves named Antonio Angola, distinguished his slaves as follows: Antonio *grande* [big] Angola, Antonio *pequeno* [small] Angola, Antonio Angola, and Antonio *moço* [youngster] Angola.⁷⁰

As the eighteenth century progressed, West African dominance gave way to two changes in the constitution of the slave population. Firstly, as has already been noted, the proportion of Brazilian-born slaves increased and surpassed the number of slaves imported from Africa by the 1790s. Secondly, the proportion of Central Africans rose from the 1740s onward. Rezende's analysis of São José del Rei in 1795 and Ouro Preto in 1804 shows that the region of West Central Africa was the most common origin of imported slaves. In São José del Rei, Central Africans constituted the majority or 54.1% of the total slave population, followed by Brazilian-born *crioulos* and *mestiços* (39.5%). West Africans, mostly Minas, at 4.8% represented a mere trickle. For Ouro Preto, the proportions of West African (5.5%) and Brazilian-born (36.9%) slaves were almost identical, but the proportion of West Central Africans (36.5%) was much lower. However, in Ouro Preto the origin of a high number of slaves was undefined.⁷¹

Although Rezende's data points to Central African predominance in São José del Rei and Ouro Preto, Minas Gerais should not be treated as a homogenous region even in the late eighteenth century. In some areas, there was a revival of West African slave imports even as mining activities declined. Santos and Correa have shown that this was the case in the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas, located in central Minas Gerais. This area had rich gold deposits between Sabará and Caeté, and included important commercial centers such as

⁷⁰ APM, CC, Códice 1068, Matricula de escravos (Serro Frio), 1738, unnumbered folios. The slave owner in question was Amaro dos Santos de Oliveira, resident in Morro Verde, listed as number 307 in the document.

⁷¹ Rezende 2006, p. 80, Table 1.

Santa Luzia, Sabará, Roça Grande, and Pitangui. The findings of Santos and Correa, based on an analysis of slave origins listed in post-mortem inventories and testaments, are presented in Table 3.7.

In the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas, the relative number of Central Africans and West Africans was more or less equal after an initial West African predominance between 1713 and 1733. This situation lasted until the 1770s, after which the proportion of Central Africans vis-à-vis West Africans diminished considerably. This can perhaps be explained by the economic changes within Minas Gerais. Connections between Rio de Janeiro and the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas loosened in the second half of the eighteenth century, whereas trade with Bahia was still carried on with certain intensity. Because the majority of Central Africans arrived in Minas Gerais via Rio de Janeiro, it was natural that their numbers were lower in the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas.⁷² In the southern *comarca* of Rio das Mortes, however, a similar set of sources, namely post-mortem inventories studied by Graça Filho and Pinto, shows that Central Africans predominated at least from the 1740s onwards. The proportion of Central Africans was 75% between 1743 and 1789, whereas West Africans represented but 15% of the slave population born in Africa. In 1790-1810, the proportion of West Africans decreased to 4%, while that of Central Africans rose to 89%.⁷³

3.3 Conclusion

The slave population of Minas Gerais grew steadily in the first half of the eighteenth century. Between 1716 and 1728, the number of slaves almost doubled from 27,000 to 52,000. By 1735, the slave population had grown to 96,000 individuals, with a peak of 102,000 slaves reached in 1739, after which the number diminished in the 1740s with the contraction of gold production in the *capitania*. However, by the time of the first official censuses in the 1770s and 1780s, the number of slaves in Minas Gerais had risen to 174,000 with 188,000 slaves being counted in the 1805 census. The economy of Minas Gerais, whether centered in gold mining as in the first half of the eighteenth century or agricultural production as in the second half, was clearly dependent on slaves, whose contribution was crucial to the functioning of the *mineiro* economy.

Slaves arrived in Minas Gerais mainly through the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. As long as the economic linkages between Minas Gerais and Bahia were strong, West African slaves dominated in the slave population. Starting in the 1730s, however, West Central Africa started to predominate

⁷² Santos and Correa 2008, 290.

⁷³ Graça Filho and Pinto 2008, 56.

as the origin of African slaves. It should be observed that Central African predominance was stronger in the southern *comarca* of Rio das Mortes. In central and northern Minas Gerais, for example in the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas, West Africans predominated even in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Throughout the eighteenth century, slaves born in Brazil were also employed in increasing numbers in the *capitania*. This process of Brazilianization was slow, but by the 1790s Brazilian-born slaves constituted the majority of the slave population. Enslaved Africans, however, continued to arrive in Minas Gerais well into the nineteenth century and Central African presence in the region was notable.

4 Central African Identities in Minas Gerais

Being interrogated by the Inquisition of Lisbon in May 1743, Luzia Pinta, a Central African freedwoman residing in Sabará, Minas Gerais, accused of witchcraft and heresy, was asked to reveal her genealogy. Luzia, who was at the time approximately fifty years old, said that she was “*natural de Angola*” or born in Angola and that her parents were named Manoel da Graça and Maria da Conceição. According to Luzia, her father had been born in “*cidade de Angola*” or “the city of Angola” and her mother was from Congo. Both resided in Luanda, which Luzia insisted on calling the “city of Angola”. Luzia told the Inquisitors that she did not know who her grandparents were or their names. She had a sister and a brother, both slaves in Luanda, owned by Manoel Lopes de Barros. All this suggests that Luzia, born into slavery, had been sold by her former owner Manoel Lopes de Barros to a slave ship that took her first to Bahia, from where she ended up in Sabará.¹ Not knowing her grandparents suggests that, as slaves, Luzia’s parents were themselves kinless outsiders in Luanda, who had either been born into slavery or had been enslaved as young children, hence erasing all links to an extended kin group.

Luzia’s testimony makes clear that when she used the term Angola, she referred to the city of Luanda. Similarly, in identifying her mother as a Congo, Luzia showed that, for Central Africans, there was a clear definition of Congo identity. Luzia was by no means the only Central African expressing these terms of origin in Minas Gerais or elsewhere in Brazil and the Americas. As will be discussed in this chapter, Central Africans defined their identity in numerous documents, not only during Inquisition proceedings but also in their testaments. These documents reveal that simple terms such as Angola and Congo could hold multiple meanings to the people who used them as markers of their identity. The definition of these terms started in West Central Africa even before these enslaved individuals commenced their Atlantic crossing and ended up in Brazil, where the processes of defining their identities continued for slaves and freedmen.

As the statistical study in the preceding chapter makes clear, there were three main Central African “nations” present in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, namely Angola, Benguela and Congo. The relative importance of each of these “nations” varied in time and space. These “nations” corresponded roughly

¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 252, Processo de Luzia Pinta, ff. 41-42.

with northern, central and southern Angola. The enslaved Africans of the Angola “nation” were individuals who embarked on the Middle Passage from Luanda. Similarly, the Benguelas embarked from the port of Benguela. However, the question of identity is more complex in the case of Congo. According to the TSTD, Brazil, and more specifically the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia that re-exported slaves to Minas Gerais, received slaves exclusively from Luanda and Benguela in the eighteenth century. The Congos were exported through Luanda but were still differentiated from others arriving on the ships from Luanda, meaning that it was perfectly clear to Central Africans and to the Brazilian slave traders and owners that there was a difference between Congos and Angolas.

Besides the three major African “nations” there were numerous other identities present in Minas Gerais that can be traced to Central Africa. Most of these “nations” were numerically small and insignificant but they remain interesting nevertheless because these individuals seem to break the rule that African slaves took on new identities attributed to them by their masters. Certainly these smaller groups could have been merged with one of the broad designations Angola, Benguela or Congo. But in Minas Gerais individuals claiming these identities did not blend with the broader Central African “nations” although, without doubt, they recognized the linguistic and cultural similarity with others originating from the same region. Within these broader Central African “nations” there were probably individuals who, in another context, would have taken on a more specified identity or recognized another “nation” as his or her own while, at least in the eyes of their masters, remaining Angolas and Benguelas. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the various African “nations” present in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais and how enslavement and forced migration to Brazil shaped the identities of enslaved Central Africans.

4.1 Identities: Lost, Retained, Transformed?

Much has been written about the identities of Africans in the Diaspora and the transformation of these identities in various New World slave societies. Many of the historians who have considered the subject from the American perspective have neglected the meanings of identity for those who were forcibly taken from their homelands and who experienced the Middle Passage under dreadful conditions. The outlying assumption has often been that, due to the dehumanizing nature of the enslavement process, what had existed before the Atlantic crossing was forever lost; the slaves were degraded in their new legal condition and had

no say in how their masters chose to identify them.² The new identities that they gradually developed as slaves were also enforced on them and were dictated by their masters' interests, preferences and inadequate understanding of African identities. Many historians of Brazilian slave society have accordingly treated the various African "nations" found in historical sources as mere inventions of the master class while admitting that these reflected the broad African regions supplying enslaved individuals to the Americas.³ However, there are other interpretations that have sought to understand the various ethnicities present in the Americas through an African prism.⁴

Lohse's path-breaking study of Africans in colonial Costa Rica is instructive in dealing with issues of identity formation in the African Diaspora. According to Lohse, through their enslavement Africans became a part of the Diaspora and began to perceive commonalities with men and women they would never have met in other circumstances. In these conditions, elements of their identities that were most tightly connected to lineage and locality could not survive. Captives had to find new links with those who shared their fate. As Lohse has pointed out,

“[t]he traumas of capture and transport to the coast began the processes by which most African men and women came to see themselves as belonging to new groups that expanded literally almost with every step. Separations and recombinations also occurred at every step along the way. Identities and identifications constantly emerged, shifted, dissolved, and became reconstituted. Disruptions, continuities, and reconfigurations of identity began for enslaved African men and women long before they arrived in Costa Rica.”⁵

Enslaved West Central Africans who were transported to Brazil came from tightly knit local communities defined most often by descent. Their loyalties rarely extended beyond small villages. In some instances by the eighteenth century, people had begun to identify with distinct, overarching political units. As Miller has characterized, “better-defined political systems of lordship and tribute overlaid some of these vague ancient commonalities and provided new primary identities for many people of the savannas, for some highland dwellers, and for some coastland and forest dwellers.”⁶ The Atlantic slave trade and interaction with the Atlantic economy led to increased competition between the

² This view was propounded, for example, in Frazier 1966; and Elkins 1963.

³ In the case of Minas Gerais, this approach is evident in Bergad 1999, pp. 149-150.

⁴ Gomez 1998; Hall 2005; Lohse 2005; Lovejoy 2003b and 2008; and more specifically in Brazil, Slenes 1999; Soares 2000.

⁵ Lohse 2005, p. 56.

⁶ Miller 1988, p. 26.

peoples of West Central Africa, emphasizing regional differences, and leading to more precisely defined notions of political and social identity.⁷ As enslaved individuals were forcibly removed from their homelands, these identities underwent further transformations.

In the coastal region of Angola, as slaving spread further and further inland, the fundamental contrast was not between Europeans and Africans, but between the older environmentally based communities of farmers and the new commercial identities of traders who collaborated with Europeans.⁸ While Lovejoy has propounded that the Atlantic world be approached through ‘the ethnic lens’,⁹ Miller has argued that, in Africa, people struggled to define themselves through belonging in multiple ways, through the diversity of the associations they could create. According to Miller, the enslaved Africans carried these strategies with them across the Atlantic, networking in various ways. Slaves adopted the religion of their masters, and through “godparenthood” and marriages tried to protect themselves and created new identities in bondage. In the commercialized urban environments, skilled males formed occupational guilds. By seizing opportunities for manumission, slaves sought to defend whatever ties of family and patronage they had been able to form. The strategies for forming networks and creating identities through association with others were numerous.¹⁰

In West Central Africa, identities and ethnicities were in constant flux throughout the era of the slave trade. As Candido has argued, ethnicity was constantly being redefined and reshaped as there were few fixed political, social, and cultural boundaries. Ethnicity was shaped by the way people defined their own identity and how other people labeled them. It was important in establishing who was an insider or an outsider in a given group. According to Candido, ethnicity in Central Africa was flexible and it was susceptible to change according to the nature of interactions between neighboring peoples. It was further shaped by warfare and environmental stress that could lead to famine and migration.¹¹

Although West Central Africa was a major supplier of slaves to Brazil, the study of African ethnic identity is made difficult by the use of broad identity designations in Brazil. In eighteenth-century Brazilian documentation, slaves are usually called by their Christian first-name plus their *nação* or “national” identification, for example João Angola, Antonio Congo, and Maria Benguela. These broad *nação* identifications referred usually to the port of embarkation in Central Africa – in the case of Angolas, it was Luanda, and in the case of

⁷ Dias 2007, p. 317.

⁸ Miller 2002, p. 51.

⁹ Lovejoy 2003.

¹⁰ Miller 2004.

¹¹ Candido 2011a, p. 185.

Benguelas, Benguela. Thus, they were not ethnic markers. However, it can be argued that these broad designations be seen as regional identities reflecting the cultural and linguistic unity of West Central African Bantu peoples. Although unable to identify exactly individual slaves' origination in Africa, it is possible to analyze how Central Africans as a group were present in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais.

The situation of Central Africans in Minas Gerais can be compared with that of Upper Guineans in Amazonia in the late eighteenth century. As Hawthorne has argued, Upper Guineans from various ethnic groups who were thrown together on plantations and colonial towns did not see themselves as comprising heterogeneous crowds but as a homogenous community: “[T]hey did not see their identities or cultures as ethnically bound. [...] They looked back to *Guiné* as a culturally unified region, and it was regional identity that they sought to re-create under oppressive conditions in Amazonia.”¹² Similarly, due to the great similarities in the world view of West Central Africans taken to Brazil from this vast region, it is appropriate to designate Angola, Congo, and Benguela as regional identities assumed by Central Africans in Minas Gerais and elsewhere in the New World.¹³

4.2 Angola

4.2.1 The Meanings of Angola

Angola was the biggest African “nation” in Minas Gerais from about 1740 to 1780. The individuals identified as Angolas embarked on the Middle Passage from Luanda. This “nation” included men and women who came from the areas in and around the Portuguese *Reino de Angola* or colony of Angola that extended inland from Luanda. For the Portuguese and the slaves who came from this region, the meanings of the term Angola changed over time. The name Angola derived in the sixteenth century from the title Ngola, referring to the ruler of the kingdom of Ndongo. In the seventeenth century, Angola was still used as a synonym for the kingdom of Ndongo. However, in the late seventeenth century Angola began to designate the whole area where Kimbundu was spoken. But Angola also held different meanings to the Europeans who visited the Central African coast to engage in slave trading. The whole coast from Loango to Benguela could be called Angola depending on the nationality of

¹² Hawthorne 2010, p. 18.

¹³ This approach is also adopted in Slenes 1999.

ship captains.¹⁴ In the eighteenth century, the term Angola was used to denote the areas nominally controlled by the Portuguese but there were other meanings as well that were used by Portuguese and African individuals.

The people who lived in the area nominally controlled by the Portuguese and from which the majority of slaves were drawn in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were speakers of the Kimbundu language and were called Ambundos in Portuguese sources, while the modern term employed here is Mbundu. Unlike many other Africans, the Mbundu community displayed an idea of linguistic unity fairly early that went beyond political boundaries. For example, King Afonso of Kongo declared himself “king of Kongo and lord of the Ambundos” in 1514. However, according to Thornton, the term Mbundu in Kongo usage applied to those Kimbundu speakers who lived in the borderlands between Kongo and Ndongo, or a district often at later times called the “Dembos” area. Other areas where Kimbundu was certainly spoken, such as Ndongo and Matamba, were distinguished from the Dembos area by King Garcia II of Kongo as late as 1656.¹⁵

Thornton has suggested that by the start of the seventeenth century, the Mbundu were starting to recognize a common identity. Portuguese documents of this period already routinely refer to the “*língua ambunda*”, an ethno-linguistic concept that had started to emerge in West Central Africa. A Jesuit source described in 1624 that, unlike the Portuguese, the Mbundus “do not call this land Angola... but it consists of many kingdoms whose natives are called Ambundos.” Despite the emerging common Mbundu identity, primary identity still remained connected to a political unit. The Kimbundu term for a geographically defined community which usually had the first line of judicial authority was *xi*. People gave their loyalty first and foremost to their *xi* that was ruled by a political authority called *soba*. A description from 1624 claimed that there were 730 such units in the land of the Mbundu. While Central Africans from this region were usually referred to as Angolas in the Americas, the names of Mbundu *xis* such as Malemba and Matamba were also noted in the New World. Thornton has argued that while enslaved Central Africans might have seen themselves as Kimbundu speakers and part of the nation of Angola, they could still differentiate themselves even in America by their membership of a *xi*.¹⁶

Why were Central Africans in colonial Brazil primarily called Angolas if contemporary Portuguese documents refer to them as the Ambundo? Thornton has suggested that the context of conflict and colonization in Angola created a unity which connected those who were not Portuguese. In the wider

¹⁴ Kukanda 2000, pp. 293-294.

¹⁵ Thornton 2000, pp. 248-249.

¹⁶ Thornton 2000, pp. 249-250.

Atlantic world, the colonial term Angola might have carried a special currency for people from this region. Those who through slavery or conquest had come under Portuguese rule were called “Angolas”, while the term “Mbundus” was applied to those who remained outside Portuguese control. The latter term was also kept as a solely linguistic one for the language spoken by Mbundu and Angolas alike.¹⁷ The term Angola, at least in eighteenth-century usage, carried many different meanings which further help to explain its wide occurrence in the Americas.

In order to understand the different identities that emerged among the slaves in Minas Gerais, it is helpful to begin by looking at how enslaved individuals identified themselves in Central Africa. Unfortunately the sources on slave identities in eighteenth-century and earlier Angola are nearly non-existent, whereas such documentation exists for the nineteenth century.¹⁸ However, examination of one eighteenth-century Inquisition case reveals inclusion of such data. This is the *processo* of João Pereira da Cunha, the captain major of Ambaca, who was accused of idolatry and arrested by the Inquisition of Lisbon in the 1740s. He was brought from Angola to Lisbon to answer the charges along with his concubine Catarina Juliana and their eleven slaves. Eight of the slaves were women and three men but one of the women was not questioned because she did not speak Portuguese. The slaves’ interrogation took place in February and March 1751 and they all had to disclose their origin at the beginning of the questioning.¹⁹ Although this sample is quantitatively insignificant, it offers valuable qualitative information because the slaves described their origins in their own words. The interviews offer a valuable glimpse into how Central African slaves interpreted the term Angola.

Of the ten slaves who were questioned, three were born in Luanda. Two of them, Josefa and Antonio Correa, were *parda* and *pardo* respectively, and both had been baptized in the Freguesia de Nossa Senhora dos Remedios. To be exact, Josefa had already been freed by her master. They were about the

¹⁷ Thornton 2000, p. 252.

¹⁸ Curto 2008b, has studied the origins of runaway slaves, which were published in the *Boletim Oficial de Angola* between 1850 and 1876. In 576 cases, the origin of the runaway was published. Usually (526 cases), the origin of the slave in question was listed as *naturalidade* or place of birth. However, in some cases (44), the term *nação* or nation was used, for example “Antonio, slave, of the Benguela nation”. In another 6 cases, the details were far more oblique, for example “a black Congo female by the name of Quisseba.” The 576 slaves originated from 91 places spread across West Central Africa. Silva 2010, is developing a project that traces the origins of slaves shipped from Africa based on lists of liberated Africans that were compiled by the mixed commissions courts of Cuba and Sierra Leone between 1819 and 1845.

¹⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, Sumário dos exames aos escravos do sargento-mor João Pereira da Cunha, governador do presídio de Ambaca. The interrogations are archived as a separate *processo* although they did not result in condemnation. Of the eleven slaves, one, Lucrecia, was not interrogated because she did not understand the questions that were put to her – “por ser tão buçal, e cerrada, que não percebe as perguntas que lhe fazem” (f. 82).

same age, Antonio eighteen and Josefa eighteen or nineteen. The Inquisitors suspected that they were João Pereira da Cunha's and Catarina Juliana's children because they clearly had a white father, but both denied this, and Catarina in her interrogation said that she had only given birth to a child who had died as a baby.²⁰ Both called Catarina their mother, but this was rather an allusion to a fictive kin relation than to actual descent. Both Antonio and Josefa clearly had an elevated status in their household and both enjoyed a degree of independence. Josefa had already been given her freedom and claimed that she lived on her own, although she did go to her former master's house to do the laundry. Antonio Correa could read and write, and he was the only slave who signed his name at the end of the interrogation. Gracia, the third slave who was born in Luanda, showed a different degree of acculturation. Not knowing her age but estimated to be between fifteen and eighteen years old, she referred to her birthplace, Luanda, as *Cidade de Angola*. Interestingly, this same expression was used by Josefa many times to refer to Luanda, although both Josefa and Antonio initially used the expression that they were from the city of Luanda in the *Reino de Angola*. Gracia's interrogation does not contain information about whether she was baptized, but she knew the prayers Our Father and Ave Maria.²¹

As the statements of the three witnesses make clear, the term Angola had at least two meanings in the eighteenth century. It referred not only to the geographical area where the Portuguese had established administration and military outposts (*Reino de Angola*) but also to the capital of that area, Luanda. Hence it is not surprising that the slaves who embarked from Luanda came to be called Angolas in colonial Brazil whether they originated from the coastal areas or hundreds of kilometers inland. However, there was also a third connotation given to the term, which makes the process of identity formation in Brazil even more understandable. Cunha's slave Mariana, about fifteen years old, said that she was "natural do sertão de Angola" or the Angolan backlands. Mariana was not asked about the details of her enslavement so it is impossible to know if she had forgotten the name of her birthplace or if she simply refused to say it and made an allusion to the *sertão* out of convenience. However, the fact that she said she did not know the names of her parents implies the former and that she had been enslaved at a tender age. Mariana, like other slaves in João Pereira da Cunha's household, was baptized, "in one of the churches of the city of Luanda",

²⁰ Kananoja 2010, p. 457.

²¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 6-12, 21-27v, 43-50. The Inquisitors had their doubts about all of the statements that the slaves made, especially those concerning their residence in Ambaca, where the alleged heresies had taken place. The slaves usually first denied that they had been in João Pereira da Cunha's household in Ambaca. Gracia, out of fear, first denied that she even knew a man named João Pereira da Cunha. However, they did not have any reason to lie about their place of birth.

but she had not been conferred the sacrament of confirmation yet.²²

As the above discussion shows, the term Angola had various meanings in the mid-eighteenth century. The Portuguese spoke officially of *Reino de Angola*, which they regarded as their conquered realm although Lisbon exercised only a loose influence over its claimed dominion. In addition to the city of Luanda, the *Reino* included the areas around the military forts of Muxima, Ambaca, Massangano, Cambambe, and Pungo Andongo.²³ Besides being a military-administrational term, Angola was used as a synonym to the city of Luanda in the expression "*Cidade de Angola*". However, Angola was also used more obliquely in a general reference to the Angolan "backlands". The fact that these terms were all used by Central Africans enslaved in their homeland suggests that slaves who arrived in Brazil from this area would certainly have recognized the term Angola. It also shows that Angola was not only an identity used to designate people exported through Luanda, but it also became a term adopted by people in Luanda and in the Portuguese colony.

In this light, the contention that the "national" identity or provenance group called Angola was forcibly attributed to slaves by their masters in Brazil becomes questionable. It is true that the masters listed their slaves by adding the name of the provenance group to the slaves' Christian name but at least in the case of Angolas, this was a term that many of them would have recognized and with which they would have been comfortable. If questioned, most slaves could have named their home village as their birthplace and primary marker of identity, but as Mariana's answer shows, some slaves were already in the process of becoming Angolas before leaving the African continent. Moreover, a large majority of slaves embarking on the Middle Passage from Luanda were familiar with these and perhaps other connotations of the term Angola. The experience of the Middle Passage left an ineradicable mark on slaves who survived it and in Brazil, the term Angola even gained a new significance as it was connected to this traumatic experience.

The identities of enslaved Central Africans, whether arriving on the coast from nearby areas or hundreds of kilometers inland, would have already started to change before embarking on the Middle Passage. One of the prerequisites for survival in the harsh conditions of the Atlantic crossing and in the work regime of the mines and agricultural estates of Minas Gerais was the building of meaningful relationships with one's fellows. For West Central Africans, two conditions would have worked in a newcomer's favor. These were the shared similarities in the Bantu languages and in the world view or cosmological core that affected the cultural interpretations of worldly and,

²² ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 68-71.

²³ Heywood 2002, p. 95.

perhaps more importantly, otherworldly phenomena.²⁴ To these two conditions could be added a third element, namely the emergence of the idea of a shared space that was formed by the spreading of Portuguese influence in the *Reino de Angola*.

As Slenes has argued, West Central African Bantu-speakers easily understood the structure and vocabulary of other Bantu languages that were spoken in the region.²⁵ The Italian Capuchin Father Cannecattim, who published a Kimbundu-Portuguese-Latin dictionary²⁶ and observations of the grammatical structure of Kimbundu in the early nineteenth century, wrote that the enslaved individuals who arrived in Luanda from as far inland as the Lunda Empire, spoke Kimbundu by the time they arrived on the coast. The journey from the far interior to the coast could take several months. Cannecattim claimed that it took twice as long to get from Lunda to Kasanje as it took to get from Kasanje to Luanda.²⁷ Xavier Pedro, one of João Pereira da Cunha's slaves, said in his testimony that it took 30 days to get from Kasanje to Luanda,²⁸ but the same distance could take considerably longer for a slave caravan. Progressing between five and ten kilometers per day, according to Miller, it could take up to four months to cover the distance between Kasanje and Luanda. The slaves arriving from the Lunda capital, which lay four to five months from Kasanje, would have spent up to nine months marching by the time they arrived in Luanda.²⁹ This would have given them ample time to adjust to linguistic changes along the way. Slenes has pointed out that in the case of Central Africans, the argument that communication between slaves would have started only once they arrived in the Americas and learned a pidginized European language can be rejected outright. The roots of words expressing the basic concepts of daily life were largely universal for Bantu languages. According to Slenes, what differences exist between the languages of this group can be compared to the differences between two Romance languages.³⁰

Linguistic affinity was important for the newly arrived Central African slaves in Brazil. Although some Central Africans arriving in Minas Gerais had at least learned the rudiments of the Portuguese language in Angola, there were always those who did not speak their masters' language. However, in such cases there were usually slaves from the same "nation", although not necessarily even speaking the same language, who would translate the messages between slaves and masters to the newcomers. In Minas Gerais, this was noted

²⁴ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 56.

²⁵ Slenes 1991-1992, p. 50.

²⁶ Cannecattim 1804.

²⁷ Cannecattim 1859 [1805], pp. xiv-xv.

²⁸ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, f. 28.

²⁹ Miller 1988, p. 192.

³⁰ Slenes 1991-1992, p. 51.

by *Alferes* Custodio Pereira da Rocha in the 1750s, who reported that when one of his recently arrived slaves of the Angola “nation” needed to make himself understood, he spoke in a language that was understood by a more experienced female slave, who translated his words into Portuguese.³¹ This example shows that even in cases where slaves arrived alone in a foreign environment, they usually found fellows who spoke their language or at least could communicate in languages that were mutually intelligible. In slavery in Brazil, they were able to create meaningful relationships with others who originated in the same broad geographic region.

Slaves arriving in Luanda from the deep interior would perhaps have encountered greater difficulties in adapting culturally to their new environment other than linguistically. These individuals had possibly never encountered whites or mulattos before. They were not baptized and had never heard Portuguese. In other words, people living outside the Portuguese sphere of influence would have needed time to adapt to the Atlantic Creole culture of Angola. It should be remembered, however, that all aspects of cultural life were not strange to these newcomers either. Even in the core areas of Portuguese influence many cultural elements in society remained more African than Portuguese. In a cultural milieu where mutual exchanges and borrowings were common, old traditions were never totally abandoned in favor of new influences, and this helped those slaves who encountered the Portuguese for the first time as they neared the coast.

These conditions in Central Africa are crucial if one wants to understand the formation of the Angola “nation” in colonial Brazil and in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. Called by their Christian first names in Brazil, the individuals who were given the Angola identity, but who also claimed this identity, came from a large area in Central Africa that extended as far inland as the Lunda Empire. Certainly, these individuals came from different backgrounds and identified with different political entities or small villages. What made these slaves identify as Angolas in Brazil was their embarkation in the port of Luanda. This was perhaps the only condition that initially mattered to the slave traders and masters. But psychologically they had started to become Angolas even before arriving in the New World. They had started to form bonds with others while marching to the coast, while waiting for embarkation, and in the holds of the slave ships.³² The forming of these bonds was helped by similar languages that were spoken by individuals from different villages and polities, and by a similar world-view. Finally, Angola as a space, whether this meant the

³¹ AEAM, *Devassas eclesiásticas*, Z-8, ff. 85-86.

³² Although neglected by earlier scholars of the Atlantic slave trade, recent studies have shown that the forming of close bonds between shipmates was common. These bonds could last beyond the ship’s hold in the Americas, or they could be replaced by new relationships with others who originated in the same region. Gomez 1998, pp. 154-158; Hawthorne 2008; Smallwood 2007, pp. 101-121; Rediker 2008, pp. 303-307.

city of Angola, the *Reino de Angola*, or the *sertão* of Angola, was recognized by many of these enslaved individuals as a common background that was to become the identity they were called by their masters.

According to Slenes, the common ground on which Central African solidarity in Brazil was based lay on the mutual recognition of the word *malungo*. Slenes has argued that there are two possible origins for the term. *Malungo* could be derived from the confluence of the Kimbundu word *m'ulungo* and the Kikongo word *m'alungu*, both of which meant “in the canoe”. But it could also have originated in the word *malungu*, which in both Kimbundu and Umbundu language signified “comrade”. Whatever the case, the word had great resonance among the slaves who embarked either in Benguela or Luanda. For them, it signified the comrades of the slave ship. It could also be translated as “comrades in suffering”. In Brazil, not only the individual’s actual shipmates, but any slave originating in Central Africa could be called *malungo*, whether the individuals in question had arrived on the same ship or not. According to Slenes, *malungo* also had a cosmological meaning for Central African slaves because it was connected to the word *kalunga*, which signified the ocean in Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu. But *kalunga* also signified the dividing line between the worlds of the living and the dead. Crossing the *kalunga* meant death but symbolically it could also mean rebirth. The meaning of the word *malungo* can then be interpreted as a “comrade in the crossing of the *kalunga*”. According to Slenes, the word *malungo* encapsulates the process by which Central African slaves began to see each other as comrades in Brazil.³³

4.2.2 Angolas in Minas Gerais

Central Africans in Brazil continued the process of defining the meanings of Angola. In eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, members of the Angola nation left testaments that are one of the few remaining sources referring to the ongoing processes of self-identification. Although testaments were purely legal and religious documents, where the testators dictated how their possessions should be divided between inheritors and how their burial should be properly conducted, they almost always contained self-determined references to the individual’s origin, be that a birthplace, a region where they embarked on the Middle Passage, or mention of one’s “nation” in Brazil. Although few in number, the various meanings of Angola appear clearly in these documents.

Maria da Silva, a freed black resident in Mariana, dictated her last will in 1751 when terminally ill. She was a rare individual in that her testament

³³ Slenes 1991-1992, pp. 52-54.

also supplies the names of her parents. Maria said that her parents were called Mariana and Damião, both of the “Angola nation”, suggesting that she had not been enslaved as a small child but had enjoyed the company of her parents long enough to cherish their memory on her deathbed. She also said that she was “*natural da cidade de Angola*”, or born in the city of Angola.³⁴ Maria’s declaration of her origin raises two important questions. Firstly, would her parents, both of whom were most likely baptized Catholics as their Christian first-names show, have identified themselves as being of the “Angola nation”? If they had both stayed in Luanda, this would mean that the Africans in Luanda were identifying themselves as people pertaining to the Angola “nation”. Another possibility is that the whole family was sent to Brazil as slaves and assumed the Angola identity there. However, the most likely explanation is that Maria was simply using the term *nação* as it was used in Minas Gerais and because she herself had claimed the Angola “nation” as a constituent part of her identity under enslavement and as a freedwoman.

The second important question is why did Maria choose to call her birthplace “city of Angola” instead of calling it Luanda? Another freedwoman, Laurianna de Souza, whose testament dates from 1782, said that she was “*natural da cidade de Loanda*” or born in Luanda, where she had also been baptized. However, to date, no reference has been found referring to Luanda as a “nation” in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. Laurianna’s use of the name Luanda probably reflected a personal choice, similar to Maria also probably making a conscious choice in adopting an Angola identity instead of calling herself a Luanda. Angolas were far more numerous in the *mineiro* population and claiming this identity rather than the more exclusive Luanda identity would have widened Maria’s possible network of “countrymen and women”. Laurianna would not have felt herself a stranger among enslaved Central Africans either. However, there are other reasons to suspect that she had perhaps distanced herself somewhat from other Africans. Although Laurianna was not married, she most likely had lived in a consensual union with her former master Antonio Leite Toscano, as indicated by the names of three of her children. They were José Leite Toscano, Francisco Leite and Tereza Maria Leite. José and Francisco were named as the executors of her will. Laurianna had four more daughters, who were already married.³⁵

All testaments do not give such clear allusions to the individual’s past. Marcela dos Reis and Izabel Pereira, freed women whose testaments were prepared in 1753 and 1759 respectively, both said that they were “*natural de*

³⁴ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 71, ff. 118v-119.

³⁵ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 57, ff. 185-185v. Laurianna excluded her married daughters from inheriting because she had already given them dowry. On consensual unions between colored women and white men, see Furtado 2003; Netto 2008.

Angola” or born in Angola. As has been seen, this could mean anything between Luanda and the far interior. It seems that both women wanted to identify first and foremost as freed blacks, *pretas forras*. In their testaments, they did not emphasize an identity tied to a specific African “nation” present in Minas Gerais at this time, but they undoubtedly both identified as Angolas. Their primary social ties were with other freed or free individuals, whose origins are not revealed by the documents. Marcela dos Reis, who had never married, named three men to supervise the execution of her will: *Alferes* Joseph da Costa Correa de Araujo, *Alferes* Francisco de Souza Silva, and João Cordeiro Vieira. She also revealed that she had loaned two golden studs to another freed black from West Africa, named Josepha Cobu.³⁶

Izabel Pereira, in turn, was married with a freed black named Luis Vieira Machado. Two of Izabel’s slaves, Manoel and Antonio, were Central Africans. Her testament specified that they originated from “*Costa de Angola*”, or the Coast of Angola. This expression is as vague as the above-mentioned reference to *sertão de Angola*. There are two possibilities that explain the expression Coast of Angola. Either Izabel meant that they had simply embarked on the Middle Passage on the Angolan coast in Luanda, or that they were both born near the coast. The latter option in this case is more likely. Since Izabel was herself from Angola, she was probably more aware of their actual birthplace than her last will indicates.³⁷

The expression “*natural da Costa de Angola*” was also used in the testament of freedwoman Maria Gomes Chaves, who dictated her testament in Mariana in 1780 while lying sick in bed. Again, the expression suggests that Maria was born and had been enslaved near the coast. Central Africans of the Angola “nation” certainly had other, more precise identities connected to their homeland, but these for the most part remained hidden to the white observers. What mattered to the individuals who became slaves in Minas Gerais and other Brazilian regions was, first and foremost, to create bonds of affection with others who shared the same fate. In such circumstances, it would have been meaningless to emphasize an identity tied to a specific African village or descent group. While the memory of one’s homeland never receded, at least for those who were enslaved as adolescents or adults, people from the same region joined together in more extensive and more inclusive units. “Coast of Angola” was simply a way of expressing that the individual originated near to the principal slaving port of Central Africa, Luanda, as opposed to someone who had been enslaved far in the interior.³⁸

³⁶ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 64, ff. 45-46v. On similar social relations between white men and black women, see Paiva 2001, pp. 51-52.

³⁷ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 59, ff. 54v-57.

³⁸ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 57, f. 39v.

It is striking how rarely the term *nação* was used in testaments crafted by Angolas in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. The usual expression was “*natural de Angola*” as in Thiodozia de Crastos’ testament from 1748.³⁹ The same expression was used in Maria de Souza da Conceição’s last will in 1778. She was another Central African, whose testament revealed a bit more of her African background. Maria said that she was baptized in Angola but her parents were non-Christian. This would suggest that she did not come from areas of immediate Portuguese influence but outside the *Reino de Angola* and most certainly not from Luanda. However, through a process of reidentifying she came to recognize Angola as her homeland, along with others who began their journey from freedom to slavery, and in Maria’s case, back to freedom, in the vast region of West Central Africa.⁴⁰

Another way to express one’s Central African identity was demonstrated by a freed black called Izabel Pinheira, whose last will was formulated in 1741 in Rossa Grande. Izabel declared that she was “*filha de Angola*” or a “daughter of Angola”.⁴¹ This was another way of saying that she had been born in Angola, but she did not reveal anything else of her African background. Finally, an allusion to the *Reino de Angola* also resurfaced in Minas Gerais, as Gracia Pereira Fonseca’s testament from 1788 demonstrates. The wording of her last will shows that Gracia came from the territory at least nominally controlled by the Portuguese. In Minas Gerais, she had been bought by a freed *crioulo* called Ignacio da Rocha Rodrigues, who had freed her and then married her. Gracia’s possessions included a young boy of the Angola “nation”.⁴²

How representative were the testaments crafted by African freedmen and freedwomen? Clearly, the number of former slaves whose testaments have survived to the present day is small. There is also a gender bias in these testaments, because relatively more female slaves were freed than men. Most of the Africans brought to Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century lived the rest of their lives as slaves and only a small number of those who managed to obtain their freedom ever drew up a will. However, the value of these documents lies in the fact that, through testaments, Africans themselves could participate in the process of defining their identity and what mattered to them in terms of remembering their background. The testaments show that these Central African women had adopted Angola as a definitive marker of their identity. The choice of adopting this identity was shaped by their experience of enslavement, Middle Passage, and coming together in Minas Gerais with Africans of different backgrounds.

³⁹ APM, Câmara municipal de Sabará, Códice 20, ff. 21v-22.

⁴⁰ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 54, ff. 133v-134.

⁴¹ CBG, Livro de testamentos, Códice 4, ff. 79v-80v.

⁴² CBG, Livro de testamentos, Códice 41, ff. 36-40v.

To overcome the harsh conditions of slavery and to conform to *mineiro* society as freedwomen, the Angolans in question had also adopted a Catholic identity, which is manifest in their testaments. They had differing experiences with Catholicism before being shipped to Brazil. While some had been taken by their parents to be baptized as children, others had not been in contact with Christianity until shortly before their embarkation. Although they had arrived in Minas Gerais with names such as Maria Angola, they had subsequently taken Portuguese surnames. This was a way of showing to others that they had passed from the condition of slavery to that of a freedwoman and had gained the status of *pretas forras*. Some of them were members of black lay brotherhoods, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The experiences of Angolan freedmen and freedwomen demonstrate that some West Central Africans managed to succeed by gradually adapting and conforming to the norms of *mineiro* society. At another end of the adaptation spectrum were all those slaves who aspired to freedom by running away rather than by waiting patiently for manumission. Successful runaways tended to congregate in *quilombos* or runaway communities, which thrived in the mountainous terrain of the mining region. In the eighteenth century, at least 160 *quilombos* existed in Minas Gerais.⁴³ Little is known of the constitution and organization of these communities, but it is known that *quilombos* could offer the possibility of uniting runaways who shared similar origins. In Minas Gerais, a *quilombo* called Nova Angola (New Angola) was destroyed in 1759 in a campaign that targeted several *quilombos* in Sapucaí. Nova Angola was a quite large runaway community with 90 houses, perhaps accommodating several hundred people. Twenty-five people, including some children, were captured when the *quilombo* was attacked. Almost all of them were of the Angola “nation”, confirming that Nova Angola really was organized by and for West Central Africans.⁴⁴ Evidence that regional origins mattered for Africans early in the colonization of Minas Gerais was also evident in the planned slave rebellion of 1719, which involved both Central African Angolas and West African Minas. Planned to start on Easter Thursday while the whites were attending mass, the rebellion was undone by a quarrel between these two “nations” over the right to name a king to lead the rebellion.⁴⁵

Angola was an overarching identity for Central Africans of various backgrounds, who were enslaved in the Portuguese controlled area of *Reino de Angola* or beyond it. What first unified these enslaved individuals was their common experience of the Middle Passage, which commenced in Luanda or

⁴³ Guimarães 1996, p. 142.

⁴⁴ Barbosa 1972, p. 50, calling the *quilombo* by the name of Morro da Angola. Based on a map of the expedition, the name is corrected to Nova Angola by Martins 2008, p. 708.

⁴⁵ Vallejos 1985, p. 24.

“the city of Angola”. They were also unified by their language, be it Kimbundu or one of the other mutually intelligible Bantu languages. They also shared a common cosmological world-view which will be examined in more detail in the next chapter. But not everyone shipped from Luanda identified themselves as Angolas in Minas Gerais. A marked exception was the Congos.

4.3 Congo

Congo was the third most important Central African “nation” in Minas Gerais through the period studied. Like Angolas, the majority of the individuals of the Congo “nation” were exported during the eighteenth century from Luanda. It is therefore important to understand why, although masters tended to group the slaves into “nations” according to the port from which they embarked on the Atlantic crossing, these individuals came to be called Congos in Brazil. There were clearly characteristics that made the Congos stand out among their fellow Central Africans. The Congos must have displayed a strong group identity that separated them from those enslaved individuals who were called Angolas.

One characteristic that stuck out was their language. The language that the people spoke and continue to speak in this area was Kikongo. According to Hilton, it was clearly distinct from Kiteke, spoken in the areas north of the Kikongo-speaking region at Malebo Pool, and from Kimbundu which was spoken south of the Dande River.⁴⁶ As speakers of a Bantu-language, Congos on their way to slavery would have understood their Mbundu shipmates, but language would also have given them a sense of separate identity in Brazil.⁴⁷ This of course required there being large contingents of enslaved Congos in the areas where they ended up in Brazil so that differences between the identities of Congos and Angolas would have been obvious to the slaveholders as well.

However, for Congos in Africa language was not a primary marker of group identity, at least not until the twentieth century. Thornton has argued that the Congos who ended up in the Americas began to formulate a group identity and the Congo “nation” first emerged in the Americas among people who spoke a common African language. The kingdom of Kongo never controlled all the people who spoke the Kikongo language. While the subjects of the kingdom of Kongo identified themselves as Esikongo (sing. Mwisikongo), Kikongo speakers outside of the kingdom of Kongo called themselves mwisi- followed by a state or clan name. According to Thornton, the idea of an identity linked to the old kingdom that included all the speakers of Kikongo had grown by the 1950s,

⁴⁶ Hilton 1985, p. 1.

⁴⁷ According to Thornton 2000, p. 244, Kikongo and Kimbundu are closely related languages and each could be learned by a native speaker of the other in a matter of a few months.

but the Congo “nation” in the Americas predated its equivalent in Africa by three full centuries as Kikongo speakers from outside the kingdom of Kongo found a common identity with those from within the kingdom.⁴⁸ MacGaffey has similarly argued that, prior to the twentieth century, Congos identified themselves primarily “as adherents of this or that matrilineal clan, which might itself be linked to other clans in the neighborhood by ties of patronage and ritual dependency.”⁴⁹

Another factor that advanced the development of a separate Congo identity in Brazil was the political and religious tradition which gave the Congos a strong identity based on the history of the kingdom of Kongo. Starting from the conversion of King Nzinga a Nkuwu in 1491 and his baptism as João I, Kongo upheld a reputation as a Christian kingdom that had a strong political ally in the king of Portugal. Kongo’s political unity, however, started to crumble following their defeat by the Portuguese in the battle of Mbwila in October 1665. The country slid into civil war that lasted until the restoration of King Pedro IV in 1709. However, Kongo never returned to its former glory but became a weak rural-based monarchy. The royal Christian cult was maintained by the king and royal titleholders throughout the countryside although the mission establishment shrunk considerably by the second half of the eighteenth century. Broadhead has argued that Catholic trappings never entirely disappeared, and the spiritual powers of the king were still highly regarded in the countryside even when his political powers were minimal. São Salvador, the royal capital was explicitly connected with the other world through its burial grounds for nobility in the twelve ruined churches of the city.⁵⁰

The kingdom of Kongo was socially divided into towns (*mbanza*) and tiny villages in the rural countryside. Kongo tradition represented this division as an ethnic one, with the nobility and people of the capital regarded as outsiders, while the natives resided in the rural villages (*lubata*). But the realms of *mbanza* and *lubata* did not represent a simple class or ethnic division. Thornton has argued that each of these two sectors was a complete social system with its own pattern of production, distribution, and exchange, and its own structure of status and power. The towns and the countryside were never equal, but towns dominated the country. In the villages, production was regulated by kinship, while in the towns centralized agriculture needed slaves to maintain production. Although towns such as São Salvador and Mbanza Soyo had high population

⁴⁸ Thornton 2000, pp. 244-248. Similarly for Yorubas, group identity was more consciously operative in the Americas than in Africa. As Gomez 1998, p. 55, has argued, the Yoruba in Africa were much more loyal to their respective towns, but within the context of New World enslavement, their common language and culture combined to erase former boundaries of locality. On the Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World, see also Falola and Childs, eds., 2004.

⁴⁹ MacGaffey 1995, p. 1028.

⁵⁰ Broadhead 1979, pp. 625-626.

densities and dominated the kingdom politically and economically, the majority, between two-thirds and four-fifths, of people still lived in rural villages.⁵¹

Broadhead has argued that Kongo had stabilized politically by 1718. In the eighteenth century, the central core of the kingdom was governed directly by the king and served as the ritual center. Other polities, governed by titled nobles invested by the king, participated in the affairs of the kingdom. There were also more peripheral polities, many with roots in the seventeenth century kingdom, which had continuing links to the kingdom or to one or other of its constituencies, but not regularly involved in the affairs of the capital. The kingdom remained relatively stable between 1718 and 1763, generally at peace with its neighbors and with the constitution of Pedro IV apparently intact.⁵² Even in the second half of the eighteenth century, when royal authority was unstable, the idea of a single kingdom prevailed. Provinces claiming political independence still saw themselves as part of the kingdom, as attested by Father Cherubino da Savona's account in 1775.⁵³

In the eighteenth century, according to Thornton, there were two contending political traditions or philosophies in Kongo. Whereas the earlier traditions emphasized the role of kings as strong and violent rulers, a new tradition that attempted to unite the kingdom through a policy of reconciliation began to emerge during the reign of King Pedro IV. The new tradition presented the kingdom's founder as a blacksmith king, a conciliatory figure in West Central African culture. A larger moral idea behind these contrasting constitutional principles was that the kings should always use their powers in the public interest, to rule fairly and to share unselfishly their wealth and power. According to Thornton, the enslaved Kongolese maintained these political traditions in the New World. Allegiance to the king and to Kongolese political traditions were manifested, for example, during the Haitian revolution, when one of the leaders of the rebellious slaves swore allegiance to the king of Kongo.⁵⁴

Although the kingdom's centralizing power was ruined by the early eighteenth century, because the kings were unable to appoint or remove many of the most important officials, the idea of the indivisibility of the kingdom persisted among the elite. Furthermore, the Catholic identity of the kingdom was not affected, and Christianity remained an important part of Kongo identity. Kongolese, both the elite and ordinary people, knew the rites and tenets of Catholicism and participated in the locally organized Church. Enslaved Congos could thus fall back on their language and their political and religious tradition to gain a sense of group identity in Brazil. Although the kingdom had

⁵¹ Thornton 1983, pp. 15-28.

⁵² Broadhead 1979, pp. 641-642.

⁵³ Savona 1963.

⁵⁴ Thornton 1993a, pp. 181-198.

lost its significance as a political unit, Kongo still continued to be cited as their homeland by individuals who were drawn into the orbit of enslavement in this region during the eighteenth century.⁵⁵

Ambaca's former Captain-Major João Pereida da Cunha brought four slaves with him to Lisbon who claimed Kongo as their homeland. They were all women and relatively young, between 16 and 25 years old. Their origins were recorded in two distinct ways in the examination record. It is plausible that, rather than reflecting what the slaves actually said, the different expressions recorded reflected the knowledge of the interrogating Inquisitors or the scribes who did the writing. There were two different Inquisitors and scribes responsible for the hearings. The more general way to record a Congo origin in these examinations was the expression "natural de Congo, Reino de Angola" or "born in Congo in the colony of Angola". This was the expression used in the hearings of Roza and Serafina, aged twenty and eighteen respectively. Roza named a man called Pedro Roza as her father but did not recall the name of her mother. Serafina did not remember the names of her parents, suggesting that she had been enslaved as a small child. Although claiming Congo origins, both said they had been baptized in Luanda, Roza in the church of Nossa Senhora dos Remedios and Serafina in the church of Corpo Santo. Neither indicated when their baptism had taken place nor when they had been enslaved but both had most likely been slaves in Luanda for most of their lives.⁵⁶ This makes their insistence on Congo identity even more noteworthy. Their birthplace was clearly significant to them, even if memories of their original home must have been vague.

The second expression that was used in the examinations of the other two female slaves differed somewhat from the first notion. According to the examination record, Anna and Felicianna were both "natural do Reino de Congo" or "born in the kingdom of Kongo". The use of this expression by the scribe showed more intimate knowledge of Central African political history than the general expression Congo. The kingdom of Kongo was not directly connected in the imagination of the Inquisitors to Angola, but cited as a region independent of direct Portuguese control. Anna, estimated by the Inquisitors to be 25 years old, was the only one of the interviewed slaves who told how she had been enslaved, saying that she had been kidnapped as a child and brought to Luanda. She did not remember the names of her parents. Felicianna, approximately 16 years old, did not name her parents either. Anna was never asked whether she was baptized or not, almost as if the Inquisitor presumed that being a Congo she was automatically a Christian. The question about baptism was not put to

⁵⁵ Heywood and Thornton 2009, pp. 94-97. See further subchapter 5.2, The Impact of Catholicism in the Kingdom of Kongo.

⁵⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 64-67v, 72-75. Roza and Serafina were interrogated by the Inquisitor Manoel Varejão Tavora, and Manoel Afonso Rebello acted as the scribe.

Felicianna either, but answering to the question about her master's Christian convictions, she declared that her master had ordered her to be baptized, but she did not declare where this had taken place.⁵⁷

The four examinations of these Congo slaves unfortunately reveal little about how Congo identity was conceptualized in eighteenth-century Central Africa. However, they clearly point out that this was an identity which had emerged among Central Africans and was strongly enforced by them. Hence it is not surprising that this identity was found in Minas Gerais even when most Congo slaves embarked from Luanda. The examinations also suggest that, at least in these four cases, Congo identity was not tightly connected to the language spoken by these individuals. Enslaved as small children, they still continued to demonstrate close affection to their birthplace, even if they had long since ceased speaking the Kikongo language. If this was indeed the case, other factors must have been more significant markers of Congo identity. If language was not the distinctive characteristic, political and cultural heritage must be taken into account in explaining the tenacity of this identity. But for these women, who had been separated from their traditions as children, this heritage would have made little sense. What did Congo exactly mean to these individuals?

Besides referring to language, political tradition and cultural heritage, Congo was also conceptualized as a space, a certain geographical area. If an individual was born within this area, he or she claimed Congo identity. Defining that space in the eighteenth century is more difficult since the old kingdom had disintegrated. It is impossible to say whether at this stage Congo meant people who were born in São Salvador and its immediate surroundings or if the people in the most remote villages also claimed this identity. Savona's account of 1775 implies the latter,⁵⁸ and there is no doubt that the area was recognized both by the Portuguese and Central Africans as a separate space. Perhaps certain stereotypes were connected to people who came from this area or perhaps Congos commanded a certain prestige among Central Africans. Anna's examination suggests that the Portuguese saw Congos automatically as Christian even if they had not been baptized in Kongo. Citing Congo origins was certainly more esteemed than claiming to come from the "backlands" of Angola.

Congo identity traversed the Atlantic and was maintained by enslaved Africans in Minas Gerais. It is remarkable that even individuals who were taken to Brazil as young children continued to cultivate an identity connected to their birthplace. In another Inquisition case, a Congo slave named Antonio Correa de

⁵⁷ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 51-57, 77-81v. Anna and Felicianna were questioned by the Inquisitor Luis Barata Lima, and Pedro Paulo da Silveira acted as the scribe.

⁵⁸ Savona 1963; Heywood and Thornton 2009, pp. 93-94.

Aguiar, residing in Serro do Frio, northern Minas Gerais, told his interrogators that he had been enslaved at a “tender age” and did not remember the names of his parents or grandparents. When questioned, he was thirty-three or thirty-four years old, meaning that he had spent the majority of his life in Minas Gerais. Antonio did remember that his parents were born and lived in the kingdom of Kongo. They were Catholics, and so was Antonio, who had been baptized in Kongo before his enslavement. Although far-removed from his ancestral homeland in both time and space, Antonio still continued to cherish a memory of his African past. His enslavement and sale to Brazil had not erased the link to his birthplace.⁵⁹

In *mineiro* documentation, although the term Congo was usually recorded by itself to mark a person’s identity, it sometimes occurred in conjunction with the term Angola. In the 1738 matriculation of slaves in Serro do Frio, the identity of some slaves was recorded as “Congo de Angola” or Congo of/from Angola.⁶⁰ The usage of these terms suggests that the individuals in question identified themselves as Congos but they had embarked in Luanda and hence were recognized as Congos from Angola.

The way the terms Congo and Angola became intertwined in Minas Gerais is further illustrated by the testament of a freedman named Ventura Alves da Costa, who made his last will in June 1764 in Mariana. Ventura’s testament declared that he had been born in “Reino de Angola do Congo”. The document does not refer to the time Ventura had spent in slavery or to his age at the time of crafting the testament. He had been a slave of Trucoto Alvares de Carvalho, who had freed him for three *livros* of gold. Ventura’s wife Maria Josefa da Conceição had died earlier. Ventura did not have any children by his legal wife, but before his marriage had been in an informal relationship with a slave called Lucia Mina and had a daughter with her. His daughter Anna Maria Alvares da Costa, a *crioula forra*, became his sole inheritor. Anna Maria was already grown-up and married, so there is reason to conclude that Ventura had already spent a considerable time in Minas Gerais. This is also reflected by his wish to be buried in the church of the local Rosary brotherhood of the blacks, of which he was a member.⁶¹

Although Ventura had been a slave for a long time in Minas Gerais and had built up a respectable social network, he still showed affection to his homeland. He did not directly claim membership to any African “nation” present in Minas Gerais, but citing Congo as his birthplace would have made him a member of this group. However, Ventura’s reference to “Reino

⁵⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270. The folios were un-enumerated when I consulted the documentation in April 2007.

⁶⁰ APM, Casa dos Contos, Códice 1068, Serro Frio: Escravos, Livro de Matrícula da Capitação.

⁶¹ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 68, ff. 87-88.

de Angola” suggests that he had embarked from Luanda and perhaps had a special relationship with Angola slaves, who came from the extended Central African region and spoke Bantu-languages that he understood. It is possible that in his master’s eyes, Ventura could have passed as Angola, but he clearly chose a Congo identity, at least after his manumission. Ventura’s testament also suggests that at least for him the question of origin was not a primary concern. Rather, he had to construct his network of friends in the environment into which he was forced. Ventura had a child with a West African Mina woman, who perhaps was owned by the same master. He named three men – José Alvares Pinto, Domingos Gomes da Fonseca, and João Dios Baptista, all of unknown origin and color – to supervise the execution of his will. A slave-owner himself, at least three of Ventura’s four slaves came from West Africa. They were called José Mina, Manoel Courano, and Pedro Cobu; the fourth was a woman simply called Gertrude whose origin was not declared. Portuguese would have been the preferred language of communication between Ventura and these enslaved individuals.⁶²

Although the meaning of Congo identity as it appears in the documents discussed above cannot be precisely defined, in another case one can be more certain of the issue. This is the case of a slave identified as Moxicongo in the 1738 listing of slaves in Serro do Frio.⁶³ Moxicongo was the usual eighteenth-century Portuguese orthography for the modern Mwisikongo, meaning an inhabitant of the kingdom of Kongo. More specifically it referred to residents of São Salvador/Mbanza Kongo. However, in the Serro do Frio listing, even this identity was recorded as “Moxicongo de Angola”. The individual in question had probably been born in São Salvador and lived there until adolescence or adulthood, had been brought to Luanda after enslavement, from where he was transported to Brazil.⁶⁴

In the eighteenth century, Congo identity was recognized on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite the disintegration of the kingdom of Kongo, individuals continued to cite Kongo as their homeland even if they had long since been removed from the environment where they were born. The individuals studied in the above sample were clearly proud of their heritage. They wanted to be distinguished from the Angolas although they recognized Congo as a part of Angola. They found few problems in communicating with others from this region who were their shipmates in the Atlantic crossing. In Brazil they created networks with others who ended up living in the same areas. Catholic

⁶² CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 68, ff. 87-88.

⁶³ APM, Casa dos Contos, Códice 1068, Serro Frio: Escravos, Livro de Matrícula da Capitação. In a sample of 3,975 slaves, I found only one Moxicongo while 59 slaves were identified as Congo.

⁶⁴ Congo as a nation or birthplace was similarly expressed in nineteenth-century Angola. In Curto’s study of the origins of runaway slaves in Angola from 1850 to 1876, 80 individuals out of 576 were listed as Congo, while 4 were listed as Muxicongo. See Curto 2008b, Table I.

brotherhoods would have provided a natural way of forming bonds with others for those Congos who continued to identify with the Christian background linked to the kingdom of Kongo. Clearly, Congo was a significant identity for Central Africans in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century.

4.4 Benguela

Benguela predominance in the *mineiro* slave population followed that of the Angolas and lasted from about 1780 to 1840. During this period the Benguela-based merchants were able to compete effectively with Luanda's slave traders in supplying the markets of Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. Although the presence of Benguelas can be detected in Minas Gerais from the earliest lists of slaves, so far there have been few attempts at explaining who the slaves that claimed this identity were. Benguela, apparently referred to the port itself, but the majority of the slaves who became Benguelas in Brazil did not identify themselves as Benguelas in Africa. As has been shown, the term Angola was interpreted in various ways by Central Africans. One of the meanings of Angola was the city of Angola or Luanda, and in this sense, Benguela was a similar term in that it referred to the port where the slaves began their Atlantic crossing. These unfortunate individuals originated in the hinterland of Benguela and in the central highlands, both in areas on or near to the coast and further into the interior, so that several overlapping slaving frontiers existed.⁶⁵ However, as has been argued in the case of Angola, Benguela was similarly a term used by people in Benguela, especially to refer to slaves born in the port town.⁶⁶

According to Miller, the farmers of the central highlands, known later as Ovimbundu, shared similar linguistic traits but did not claim political unity throughout the entire plateau in the eighteenth century. The largest and most powerful polities in this area included Wambu, Mbailundu and Bihe. The leaders of these polities claimed descent from seventeenth-century Jaga and competed fiercely with their neighbors. The most pressing need for ordinary people in this area was protection against the armies of the others. Frequent raiding made agriculture difficult unless fields were protected by major lords like those of Mbailundu and Bihe. A number of Luso-African traders living in these communities sought to benefit from the unstable conditions between these polities and created alliances with African rulers through marrying local women.⁶⁷

Most of the people caught as slaves in the Benguela hinterland were

⁶⁵ Candido 2006.

⁶⁶ Candido 2011a.

⁶⁷ Miller 1988, pp. 28-30.

Umbundu speakers. They were enslaved by the raiding bands of competing polities, and there were no large-scale political traditions comparable to the kingdom of Kongo in this area. The Atlantic Creole culture had made few inroads to the interior beyond Benguela by the end of the eighteenth century. Caconda was the only place in the interior where the Portuguese presence was more permanent.⁶⁸ In Brazil, Benguelas could not fall back on a Christian tradition like the Congos, because the spread of Catholicism was hampered by a lack of missionaries. This did not, however, prevent the “invention” of Benguela identity in Minas Gerais and in other regions of colonial Brazil where they ended up.

Those who adopted a Benguela identity began to acquire this identity in the same way as those who became Angolas. A collective Benguela identity began to take shape when these unfortunate individuals were enslaved and taken to the port town of Benguela. While awaiting shipment in its barracoons, they began to forge bonds that were enforced during the Middle Passage to Brazil. Despite having little contact before their enslavement, these slaves soon found that they spoke mutually intelligible dialects and languages that united them linguistically. They also found unity through widely held cultural practices and religious beliefs that were not so different from those of Angolas. Like other identities claimed by Central Africans in Minas Gerais, Benguela identity was not a construct forced on these individuals by outsiders, but there were many unifying factors on which they could lean while building meaningful connections between each other.

Besides denoting the port town, Benguela was also conceptualized as a more extensive administrative unit known as the *Reino de Benguela*. Thus, it was differentiated from the *Reino de Angola*. The city of Benguela was naturally the major town. The *Reino de Benguela* also included the inland fort of Caconda and the areas about 20 to 25 kilometers around these settlements.⁶⁹ If Portuguese control in the *Reino de Angola* was often only nominal, in Benguela it was even more so. Benguela itself was a relatively small town. By the end of the eighteenth century its population was around 3,000 inhabitants. Benguela was geographically isolated and had a reputation of being unhealthy, which limited its attractiveness. According to Candido, the number of whites remained under 100 between 1797 and 1815. Almost all of these were men. In 1797 there were nine white women but in 1809 only two white women were listed in the census data. The mulatto population was slightly more numerous and gender balanced. In 1800, there were 143 *mulato* males and 158 *mulata* females.⁷⁰ The *presidio* of Caconda had a population of about 13,000 inhabitants in the late eighteenth

⁶⁸ Candido 2006, p. 183.

⁶⁹ Heywood 2002, p. 95.

⁷⁰ Candido 2006, pp. 135, 152-155.

and early nineteenth centuries. Few whites lived in Caconda. Between 1797 and 1850, census collectors never classified more than 31 people as whites. There were considerably more mulattos in Caconda, but proportionally these few hundred individuals in the 1797-1818 censuses represented only 2% to 4% of the population.⁷¹

Taking into account the differing background of the Benguelas, it is not surprising that Benguela emerged as a separate “nation” in Brazilian slave society. In 1723 in Mariana, 106 out of 1,526 slaves present in the parish of Nossa Senhora do Carmo were identified as Benguelas.⁷² While the presence of Benguelas was recorded in Minas Gerais from the early phases of mining, the term Benguela sometimes appeared in conjunction with the term Angola in *mineiro* sources. The origin of slaves was, at times, recorded as “Benguela de Angola” or “Benguela of Angola”, as in some cases in the matriculation of slaves in Serro do Frio in 1738.⁷³ This could signify that these Benguelas were first exported to Luanda before they were transported across the Atlantic, as was the case before 1716 when the direct shipments of slaves between Benguela and Rio de Janeiro commenced. However, by the 1730s the stopovers of Benguela ships in Luanda had become rarer, although the shipment of slaves from Benguela to Luanda continued until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷⁴ It is possible that slaves who were listed in 1738 had already arrived in Brazil much earlier, but it is also possible that slave-owners recognized the affinities between Benguelas and Angolas. For Central Africans, these affinities would have been obvious, and Benguelas certainly had naturally closer relationships with Angolas and Congos than with West Africans.

There are few documents that would reveal the self-ascribed identities of Benguelas in colonial Minas Gerais. However, two Inquisition trials of Benguelas enslaved elsewhere in colonial Brazil offer such precious information. The first one is the case of a twenty-year old slave named José, who was accused of sodomy in the archbishopric of Bahia in 1703. In discussing his genealogy, José said that he was “born in Benguela” (*natural de Benguela*) and that his parents were Manoel Luis and Maria, both from Benguela. José revealed that he had been baptized in Luanda, which means that, from Benguela, he was first taken to Luanda, before commencing on the Middle Passage to Bahia.⁷⁵ In 1742, a slave named Manoel de Sousa was accused of bigamy in Pernambuco. Manoel, about 45 years old at the time of his interrogation, claimed that he was born in the “backlands of Benguela, colony of Angola” (*sertões de Benguela Reino de Angola*). Having been enslaved as a small child between five and six

⁷¹ Candido 2006, pp. 188, 197-198.

⁷² Candido 2011a, p. 188.

⁷³ APM, Casa dos Contos, Códice 1068, Serro Frio: Escravos, Livro de Matrícula da Capitação.

⁷⁴ Candido 2011a, p. 187.

⁷⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6478, ff. 6-6v.

years of age, Manoel did not remember the names of his parents but somewhat confusingly claimed that both had been born and had lived in the city of Benguela. Manoel had thus been taken to Brazil around 1702 and had been baptized in Pernambuco because, according to him, the “blacks brought from his land” to Pernambuco were not baptized. Manoel’s case suggests that, unlike José, he was transported directly from Benguela to Brazil instead of being taken to Luanda first or that, at least, he had not stayed long enough in Luanda to receive baptism.⁷⁶

The provenance of Africans was not always so clear to whites who recorded them in different registers and so an individual slave could have been recorded with various identities by different people. This is well illustrated by a case concerning a squabble between a slave-owner and a local priest about a marriage of slaves in Matozinhos around 1830. Because of the disagreements between the owner and the priest, the slaves were married privately by their owner without the official approval of the Church. Judge Joaquim Gonsalves Moreira, who reported the case to the provincial authorities, recorded the slaves in question, Sinfronio and Jacinta, as Angolas, while his friend, Father José Soares Diniz, in his report of the case marked them as Benguelas.⁷⁷ This suggests that affinities between Benguelas and Angolas were so close that they were sometimes confused by whites, but it also demonstrates that African origins were not always recorded rigorously with attention to the actual identities assumed by enslaved Africans. This might have been even more pronounced when African couples were recorded together. In this case, for example, it is possible that one of the slaves in question was identified as an Angola, with the other being Benguela.

Sometimes the African “nation” appeared in sources with a more precise origin. Rezende has found two such examples from *mineiro* sources in the early eighteenth century. These were recorded as Quibundo Banguela and Mondongo Banguela. Quibundo was also recorded by itself without being connected to other terms.⁷⁸ Quibundo was recorded separately also in Salvador in the same period.⁷⁹ The use of these terms indicates that the individuals who communicated these identities to their owners were clearly trying to keep the memory of their homeland alive. They succeeded in the sense that their owners took them seriously and recorded them in the capitation. There is no doubt that others who claimed the Benguela identity in Brazil could have claimed similar, more precise origins than the general Benguela “nation”. However, emphasizing such a separate identity could have isolated such individuals from other slaves.

⁷⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 9110, ff. 15v-16v.

⁷⁷ Corrêa 2005, pp. 111-118.

⁷⁸ Rezende 2006, p. 131.

⁷⁹ Souza 2006.

This was probably not the case with persons who managed to recreate a double identity, as shown by the examples cited above. These individuals continued to identify with their actual home village or polity, but they also took on the new identity of an African “nation”, in this case Benguela, which emerged in Brazil.

The relative number of Benguelas among African-born slaves in Minas Gerais increased in the final decades of the eighteenth century. Brügger and Oliveira, who have studied the parish registers of São João del Rei between 1782 and 1822, have shown that in burial records the percentage of Benguelas went up from 13.2% between 1782 and 1790 to 30.2% in 1791-1800. In the 1790s, Angola was still the major “nation” recorded in the burial records, but Benguela surpassed Angola in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The actual number of Benguelas had thus surpassed Angolas in São João del Rei already in the 1790s, because burial records never reflect the actual number of provenance groups in any given year. The individuals who were buried at a certain time had already been present in the given location for an undefined number of years. The findings of Brügger and Oliveira confirm Bergad’s data gleaned from a different set of sources, which also show that the proportion of Benguelas surpassed that of Angolas in the 1780s.⁸⁰

Brügger and Oliveira have also shown that the Benguelas of São João del Rei were well organized and showed a high degree of unity. They were able to do so through their membership in the local rosary brotherhood of the blacks. The Benguelas were organized within the “Nobre Nação Benguela” or the “Noble Nation Benguela”. The documentation that demonstrates the organization of Benguelas within the brotherhood is a book containing a register of masses that were bought by Benguelas and other registers of economic transactions. Although the book was started in the year 1803, the documentation within it shows that the congregation of Benguelas was already in existence by 1793. Benguelas functioned as a unified group for most of the nineteenth century. The registers show that, in 1871, they paid for masses to be said for the soul of a member called João da Cunha Preto.⁸¹

Brügger and Oliveira found that Benguela was the major African “nation” among the members whose origins were registered when they were admitted to the brotherhood between 1750 and 1848. Still, they were surpassed by Brazilian-born *crioulos* and *crioulas*. At the same time, Benguelas were not able to dominate in positions of authority within the brotherhood. Only five Benguelas held administrative positions within the brotherhood, compared to 48 *crioulos*, 25 Angolas, and 24 Minas. Benguelas were surpassed even by Congos, who held 10 administrative positions in the same period. Members attaining administrative positions within the brotherhood required economic

⁸⁰ Brügger and Oliveira 2009, p. 185; Bergad 1999, pp. 151-152.

⁸¹ Brügger and Oliveira 2009, pp. 187-188.

resources. Angola and Mina freedmen, who had been present in larger numbers for a longer time in São João del Rei, had probably been able to gather greater wealth than Benguelas, who for the most part of the eighteenth century had been less prominent among the African-born population.⁸²

4.5 Other Central African Origins/"Nations"

Besides Angola, Congo and Benguela, 27 other West Central African origins were recorded in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. While some of them were relatively common, others included only a few individuals. Members of certain "nations" were mentioned more often in the early decades of the century but later passed into total obscurity. Some of the origins are easy to trace back to West Central Africa, but in other cases they are harder to identify. While attempting to establish their frequency in Minas Gerais, various origins by geographical location will be discussed, starting from the center or colony of Angola, then proceeding to the north of the colony, and finally south to the region inland from Benguela. The most important question is why and how did some individuals manage to retain an identity clearly indicating their birthplace while others assumed a more general identity such as Angola or Benguela?

The Reino de Angola, Luanda to the Kwanza Bend

Ambaca

Quissama

Golla

Libolo/Rebolo

Massangano

Although the majority of the slaves who embarked on the Atlantic crossing in Luanda were denominated Angolas in Brazil, slave origins recorded in Minas Gerais show that some of the slaves who came from this region identified themselves more specifically. Some of them explicitly referred to districts within the Portuguese *Reino de Angola* or to African polities within or immediately adjacent to it. These individuals had been born or had lived before their enslavement in areas where Portuguese presence was the strongest. They partook in the Atlantic Creole culture that prevailed in these communities, and most of them probably spoke or at least understood Portuguese and were possibly baptized. They were in an advantageous position to communicate with their masters once they arrived in the destinations that awaited them in Brazil.

⁸² Brügger and Oliveira 2009, pp. 190-193.

Massangano was a military base established by the Portuguese as early as 1582. It was located on the Kwanza River at its strategic confluence with the Lukala River.⁸³ Administratively, it was a district (*presídio*) within the *Reino de Angola*. Ambaca, likewise, was originally a military garrison established on the Lukala River in 1618, but later also a district within the *Reino de Angola*. In the eighteenth century, Ambaca became an important center of the slave trade in Angola.⁸⁴ Slaves claiming Massangano and Ambaca identities in Minas Gerais were most likely born in the respective districts. Although the African populations within the *Reino de Angola* were in theory protected from military assaults, the presence of slaves from these locations shows that in the eighteenth century, almost any unfortunate individual could be enslaved in Angola.⁸⁵ However, their number in Minas Gerais was minimal. For example, only 5 out of 5,321 slaves (or 0.09%) in São José del Rei in 1795 were from Ambaca. In Pitanguí between 1718 and 1724, 43 slaves out of 3,651 (or 1.18%) claimed Massangano identity.⁸⁶

It is difficult to decipher why these slaves were called Ambacas and Massanganos by their masters instead of being called Angolas. Coming from the Portuguese *conquista*, the slaves themselves would have understood the meaning of Angola and they would not have been strangers among all the other Central Africans who were called Angolas. There were two prerequisites for the retention and the re-emergence of these identities in Minas Gerais. Firstly, the masters who communicated the names of their slaves to the Crown officials in the matriculations must have shown an interest in the origin of their slaves. Perhaps it was already declared to them when they purchased a slave, which would mean that some of the merchants also kept track of slave origins, or masters could have asked the slaves themselves about their place of birth. Secondly, slaves at some point must have been able to communicate their origin either to their sellers or their masters. If it happened after the slaves arrived at their final destination, this communication took place in Portuguese, which many Central Africans originating in the *Reino de Angola* would already have been able to speak, at least haltingly, before leaving Angola. Even when this was not the case, other slaves with more language competence could translate and convey the master's commands and questions to the newcomer. Thus, these more specific identities surfaced in Minas Gerais only through a mutual process of communication and interest. Otherwise, the general terms Angola, Congo, and Benguela prevailed.

⁸³ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 88.

⁸⁴ Vansina 2005.

⁸⁵ Curto 2008a.

⁸⁶ Rezende 2006, pp. 180-181, Appendix, Tabela A and B. Rezende transcribes Ambaça but I believe Ambaca is correct in this case.

Quissama (or Kisama) and Libolo were areas that lay immediately outside the *Reino de Angola* on the south bank of the Kwanza. Kisama lands were located in the arid areas near the coast, where rich mines of rock salt were found.⁸⁷ According to Miller, Kisama became a sanctuary for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of slaves fleeing captivity in the *Reino de Angola*.⁸⁸ Apparently, Kisama also served as a source for slaves. Libolo, further inland, was another important hunting ground for slaves. Besides supplying the Luanda slave trade, it was also integrated into the commercial networks of the Benguela highlands. The garrisons of Massangano, Cambambe and Pungo Andongo served as bases for Luso-African traders eager to establish trade relations south of the Kwanza.⁸⁹ In Brazil, the Libolo were known as the Rebolo. According to Bergad's data, they were the fourth biggest Central African "nation" in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, accounting for almost 5% of all Africans recorded in post-mortem inventories.⁹⁰ However, Rezende's study suggests that they only became more numerous in Minas Gerais in the late eighteenth century, when 182 or 3.4% of slaves listed in São José del Rei in 1795 were identified as Rebolo. Quissama identity, on the contrary was rare, accounting for a few individuals here and there.⁹¹ In Curto's study of runaways in Angola in 1850-1876, Libolo was the most common "nation" or birthplace and Quissama was the third most important.⁹² All this suggests that enslaved individuals were constantly captured in areas near the coast and immediately south of the *Reino de Angola*.

Individuals identified as Golla in Minas Gerais also came from areas of the *Reino de Angola*. Golla referred to an individual who originated in the lands of the former kingdom of Ndongo whose rulers were titled Ngolas. The title, which also gave the colony of Angola its name, was used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to designate the people born in this area, although Ndongo as an independent kingdom was destroyed by the Portuguese in the wars of the seventeenth century.⁹³ This identity was clearly an anomaly in Minas Gerais, claimed by a single female slave in a 1723 matriculation in Mariana. Given the similarities between the terms, if other Ngola slaves were present in Minas Gerais they most likely were designated as Angolas.

⁸⁷ Heintze 1972.

⁸⁸ Miller 1988, p. 37.

⁸⁹ Miller 1988, pp. 34, 257.

⁹⁰ Bergad 1999, p. 151.

⁹¹ Rezende 2006, pp. 180-181, Appendix, Tabela A and B.

⁹² Curto 2008b, p. 12, Table I.

⁹³ Curto 2008b, Table I, shows that Ngola was the sixth most common origin for runaway slaves in Angola in 1850-1876.

*East of the Kwanza Bend***Casange****Marimba Angola****Rundo****Songa**

Kasanje (or Casange) was an important slave market in the interior, situated west of the Kwango River. Two of captain-major João Pereira da Cunha's slaves came from Kasanje and were interviewed by the Inquisition in Lisbon in the early 1750s. Simão de Felippe, age twenty, and Xavier Pedro, eighteen years, both cited Kasanje as their homeland. Simão did not know the name of his parents and admitted that he had been bought by his master while still a small child. However, he still preserved a memory of his birthplace. Simão used the term Angola in yet one more context, saying that Kasanje was part of "*Destrito de Angola*", probably meaning the same administrative region that was called *Reino de Angola*. It is noteworthy that Simão placed Kasanje in the "District of Angola". Although the Portuguese had been trading for slaves in this kingdom since the mid-seventeenth century, they had not established formal control over Kasanje and official efforts to spread Portuguese influence to this area only date from the 1750s.⁹⁴ Thus, even in places that remained outside formal Portuguese control, people would have been using the term Angola, which further explains why so many of them easily adopted this identity in Brazil.

The other slave, Xavier Pedro, was interrogated three times, but the Inquisitors were not interested in his genealogy. Xavier Pedro's loss of freedom or at least his sale to João Pereira da Cunha was probably a more recent experience, for he claimed that he had lived with him for four years in Luanda.⁹⁵ In Xavier Pedro's examination two different ways of referring to his homeland before enslavement are found. It is impossible to know whether these expressions were simply used by the scribe to refer to Xavier Pedro's statement or if they were the actual words used by him. But taking into account that the interrogation was held in Portuguese without the help of an interpreter, it is possible that these were the actual expressions used by Xavier Pedro, who spoke Portuguese well. The words used in the documentation to refer to Kasanje were "*terra*" and "*patria*".⁹⁶ In the eighteenth century, *terra* signified not only the Earth but also the individual's place of birth. *Terra* was sometimes used as a

⁹⁴ Sebestyén and Vansina 1999.

⁹⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5067, ff. 13-20v, 28-41v.

⁹⁶ *Terra* appears on f. 28v, after the Inquisitors have asked "em que terras deste Reino, e suas conquistas tem elle declarante assistido" ("in which lands of this kingdom and its colonies has he lived"). *Patria*, on f. 36v, however, appears after a question in which the Inquisitors have again used the term "*terra*" to inquire if Xavier Pedro came straight from his "land" to Luanda or if he lived with João Pereira da Cunha first in another place.

synonym for *patria* that signified birthplace.⁹⁷ For Xavier Pedro, both terms without a doubt signified an intimate link to his homeland that was not lost despite years of living as a slave. Perhaps the voyage over the Atlantic from Luanda to Lisbon would only have reinforced such a link and identity.

In the slave population of Minas Gerais, Casange appeared as a minor ‘nation’. Bergad’s data from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicate that Casange identity was claimed by 2.2% of African-born slaves listed in post-mortem inventories.⁹⁸ Rezende found that forty individuals or 0.75% of slaves listed in São José del Rei in 1795 claimed a Casange identity, but it was rarely mentioned earlier.⁹⁹ Thus, it was not completely insignificant and, given Kasanje’s importance to slave traders in Angola, it can be presumed that individuals enslaved in this area ended up in Minas Gerais in earlier decades as well, although their presence was not documented. The predominance of the Angola ‘nation’ and identity guaranteed that individuals from Kasanje, like others enslaved in the interior between the Kwanza and Kwango Rivers, became Angolas in Minas Gerais.

In some cases, individual slaves in Minas Gerais retained the name of their birthplace along with a Christian name and a more general term indicating their origin. This was the case, for example, with Antonio Marimba Angola, listed in the 1738 matriculation of slaves in Serro do Frio.¹⁰⁰ Marimba was the capital of Matamba,¹⁰¹ an important kingdom that was taken over by Queen Njinga in the 1630s. Njinga herself was buried near Marimba.¹⁰² Matamba was a powerful kingdom that resisted Portuguese encroachment until the nineteenth century. Antonio Marimba Angola’s name in the list of slaves again shows how enslaved individuals could negotiate their identity with their masters if they were willing to listen.

Songa was an identity recorded in Bergad’s data that appeared rarely, representing 0.6% of total African-born slaves.¹⁰³ What this meant in the eighteenth century is harder to define. Songa was a polity on the mouth of the Kwanza River, whose ruler *soba* Songa allied with the Portuguese in 1581 and was baptized by them.¹⁰⁴ However, Karasch linked the Songa “nation” found in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro to modern Songo located south of Malange. According to her, Songa, Mossonga, Songo, Mussungo and Mussongo all signified the same origin.¹⁰⁵ Songo, located southeast from Ndongo and

⁹⁷ Bluteau 1712-1728, VI, pp. 320-321, and VIII, pp. 118-121.

⁹⁸ Bergad 1999, p. 151.

⁹⁹ Rezende 2006, p. 180, Appendix, Tabela A.

¹⁰⁰ APM, Casa dos Contos, Códice 1068, Serro Frio: Escravos, Livro de Matrícula da Capitação.

¹⁰¹ Karasch 1987, p. 374.

¹⁰² Cadornega vol. 3, p. 210, n. 134.

¹⁰³ Bergad 1999, p. 151.

¹⁰⁴ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ Karasch 1987, p. 376.

south from Kasanje, became a source of slaves in the early seventeenth century, although little is known of this area.¹⁰⁶ In the eighteenth century, trade routes passed through this area and slaves were transported from the interior to the coast through Songo.¹⁰⁷ Thus, if Songa equaled Songo, this would suggest a fairly distant inland origin instead of coastal, but still on the fringes of *Reino de Angola*.

Rundo probably referred to Ruund, the language of the emergent Lunda empire deep in the interior of West Central Africa. Only one slave identified as Rundo has been encountered in *mineiro* sources, in the 1718-19 slave matriculation in Sumidouro, located near Mariana.¹⁰⁸ However, this unique reference points to an early presence of the Lunda in Brazil.

North of the Reino de Angola

Cabinda

Loango

Monjolo

Mossoço

Mutemo

Quibamba

Just beyond the nominal Portuguese colony, Mutemo was a small state in the Dembo region. In the early seventeenth century, it contained a large community with a captain and a church, but during the Dutch occupation of Angola between 1641 and 1648 it headed a powerful coalition that fought against the Portuguese.¹⁰⁹ Mutemo identity emerged in slave lists in Minas Gerais as early as 1718 in Vila Rica and between 1718 and 1724 in Pitangui, but only a few slaves assumed this identity. One Mutemo individual also appeared in São Jose del Rei in 1795.¹¹⁰

Two identities referring to origins in areas north of the *Reino de Angola* present a similar dilemma as the term Angola. Cabinda was a port that served the slave trade, but it was less significant for the Portuguese and Brazilian traders compared to Luanda and Benguela. Loango was the name of a town as well as a kingdom that participated fully in the Atlantic economy and where Portuguese influence was less marked than in the *Reino de Angola*. Instead, Loango was a popular port for Dutch, English and French traders. The question is, were the enslaved individuals identified as Cabindas and Loangos in Brazil simply people who had commenced the Atlantic crossing in these ports, or were they people born in the city of Cabinda itself, or in the case of Loangos, in the

¹⁰⁶ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 74, 110.

¹⁰⁷ Miller 1988, pp. 218, 257.

¹⁰⁸ APM, Casa dos Contos, Códice 1029, Matricula de escravos empregados na mineração 1718-19 do Sumidouro (Vila do Carmo).

¹⁰⁹ Thornton 1998a, p. xxx and Map 3 on p. xii.

¹¹⁰ Rezende 2006, pp. 180-181, Appendix, Tabela A and B.

city or kingdom of Loango? The number and significance of these origins in Minas Gerais can be used to approximate an answer.

Bergad's long-term data document that Cabinda was the fifth largest Central African origin in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, representing 3.1% of African-born slaves.¹¹¹ However, Rezende found only a single Cabinda slave out of 1,047 slaves registered in Vila Rica in 1804 and none in earlier matriculations.¹¹² Similarly, none can be found in the matriculations during the first half of the eighteenth century. This would suggest that Cabindas started arriving in Minas Gerais in a later period when the legal slave trade over the Atlantic was experiencing its final burst. The Slave Trade Database shows that trade from Cabinda to Brazil really flourished only between 1808 and 1830, when over 215,000 slaves embarked in the port.¹¹³ Thus, I suspect that Cabinda was a term designating all those who embarked in this port even if they were born in the distant interior far from the town itself. Cabinda identity was formed by the experience of the Middle Passage shared by these individuals, although their birthplaces varied considerably.

Loango identity suggests a slightly different trajectory. According to the TSTD, Loango never served as an important source of slaves for Brazil, and the Database documents the embarkation of only 5,781 slaves to Brazil between 1642 and 1847.¹¹⁴ However, in Minas Gerais, Loango identity was recorded in the first half of the eighteenth century. Rezende found that in Pitangui between 1718 and 1724, 145 or almost 4% of slaves were identified as Loango.¹¹⁵ These individuals did not necessarily come from the kingdom of Loango but were brought to the coast from the interior. They embarked in the port of Loango and were sometimes bought by captains of Portuguese ships that had first called in Luanda.¹¹⁶ Although it is possible that individuals who identified as Loangos in Minas Gerais came from the kingdom of Loango, this identity was not similar to Congo identity, which often referred to a claimed origin within the former kingdom of Kongo.

Nothing certain can be said of the Quibamba identity and it was not important in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. Only one slave claiming this identity was listed in Vila Rica in 1718.¹¹⁷ A village called Quibamba in present day Angola is located in the Malange district, but whether this could point to the possible origin of the individual identifying as Quibamba in Minas Gerais is

¹¹¹ Bergad 1999, p. 151.

¹¹² Rezende 2006, p. 180, Appendix, Tabela A.

¹¹³ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 21 July 2011].

¹¹⁴ <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces> [accessed 21 July 2011].

¹¹⁵ Rezende 2006, p. 181, Appendix, Tabela B.

¹¹⁶ Miller 1988, p. 549.

¹¹⁷ Rezende 2006, p. 180, Appendix, Tabela A.

questionable. It is possible that it referred to Kikongo speakers from Mbamba, a province in the kingdom of Kongo.

The remaining two identities from north of the colony of Angola are more easily defined. The Mossoço ethnonym referred to people coming from Nsonso on the eastern border of kingdom of Kongo along the Kwango River.¹¹⁸ These Kikongo speakers had a minimal presence in Minas Gerais. Five of them appeared among the 1,450 Central Africans in Pitangui's slave lists between 1718 and 1724, and three were listed in São José del Rei in 1795.¹¹⁹

Monjolo was an identity that referred to slaves coming from the kingdom of Tio, centered on the Congo River near the Malebo Pool. They could be slaves traded by the Tio as well as Tio themselves. According to Karasch, the term used for Monjolos in colonial Brazil was Anjico or Angico,¹²⁰ but *mineiro* sources suggest otherwise. Monjolos had a steady presence in Minas Gerais. For example, in Pitangui between 1718 and 1724, matriculations recorded 154 (4.2%) Monjolos among a total of 3,651 slaves.¹²¹ Bergad found that, between 1715 and 1888, 2.1% of African slaves recorded in *mineiro* inventories were Monjolos.¹²² Like slaves originating in Kasanje, Monjolos arrived in sufficient numbers at Minas Gerais to constitute their own "nation". The shortest route to the coast would have taken Monjolos to the ports of Loango and Cabinda, but given the large number of Monjolos in Pitangui in the early decades of the eighteenth century it is likely that they were marched to Luanda, where they embarked on the Middle Passage. In the early nineteenth century, however, the natural port of embarkation for Monjolo slaves would have been Cabinda. What set the Monjolos apart as a group and gave them a distinct identity? At least in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, according to Karasch, Monjolos were easily identified by their distinctive facial scarifications.¹²³ Although not documented in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century, the possibility that *mineiro* slave owners also used visible features to attribute different African identities to their slaves cannot be rule out. This might well have been the case with Monjolos and other African identities documented in lists of slaves.

¹¹⁸ Thornton 1998a, p. xxix.

¹¹⁹ Rezende 2006, p. 181, Appendix, Tabela B.

¹²⁰ Karasch 1987, p. 18.

¹²¹ Rezende 2006, p. 181, Appendix, Tabela B.

¹²² Bergad 1999, p. 151.

¹²³ Karasch 1987, p. 17.

Benguela to Plateau and South

Cabundá

Camunda

Ganguela

Muhumbe

Mufumbe/Mugumbe

Most of the Central Africans coming from the central highlands east of Benguela were simply denominated Benguelas in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century, but the Ganguela “nation” presents a notable exception. According to Miller, thinly scattered peoples over the western tributaries of the upper Zambezi, and originally perhaps anyone in the Kalahari sand country east of the upper Kwanza and Kunene, acquired their Ngangela ethnonym from a term for the flat, sandy grasslands in which they lived.¹²⁴ Slaving spread to Ngangela areas in the 1680s, when warfare and drought led to the enslavement of people in these areas. In the eighteenth century, Ngangelas were transported to Benguela through Caconda and Bihe, but from Bihe they could also be taken to Luanda.¹²⁵ In Minas Gerais, Ganguelas were present already in the early eighteenth century, albeit in small numbers and proportions.¹²⁶ Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, they were the sixth largest Central African “nation” in Minas Gerais.¹²⁷ Very little is known of the other “nations” that originated in this area. According to Lopes, Cabundá and Camunda were variants of the same Ngangela subgroup, although Bergad in his study lists them separately.¹²⁸ Cabundá could also refer to Kimbundu speakers originating in the Luanda area.¹²⁹ A slave named Damião de Almeida, who was questioned by the Inquisition in Lisbon in 1771, told his interrogators that he was “born in Cambondá near the city of Angola”.¹³⁰ However, given that Cabundá identity became more common in Minas Gerais in the late eighteenth century, it is possible that in this case the term referred to Ngangelas exported from Benguela. In São José del Rei in 1795, they represented 1.7% (90 enslaved individuals) of the slave population.¹³¹

Muhumbe identity indicated individuals originating in the kingdom of Humbe in the interior of southern Angola. Portuguese slaving spread to this region in earnest in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹³² Muhumbe identity started to appear in *mineiro* documents in the late eighteenth century. The presence of 44 individuals identifying as Muhumbe was recorded in São

¹²⁴ Miller 1988, p. 23.

¹²⁵ Miller 1988, pp. 150, 221.

¹²⁶ Rezende 2006, p. 180-181, Appendix, Tabela A and B.

¹²⁷ Bergad 1999, p. 151.

¹²⁸ Lopes 2003, p. 50. Cf. Bergad 1999, p. 151.

¹²⁹ Karasch 1987, p. 374.

¹³⁰ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 724, f. 31.

¹³¹ Rezende 2006, p. 180, Appendix, Tabela A.

¹³² Obi 2008, pp. 48-51.

José del Rei in 1795, and one Muhumbe slave was found in Vila Rica in 1804.¹³³ Terms Mufumbe and Mugumbe likely represent alternative spellings of people coming from Humbe.

Unidentified

Bimba

Bomba Angola

Caburu

Cambuta Angola

Mochiga

Mucange

Mutumo Angola

Seven Central African origins were recorded in Minas Gerais that remain unresolved as it has not been possible to confirm their meaning with any certainty. Bimba is a common word that could belong to several languages and refer to many places. Bomba could refer to a place of the same name in the highlands south-east of Benguela. There are several places in Angola called Cambuta and also a river by that name. Mochiga resembles phonetically Moxico, a province in modern Angola, east from Benguela. Mucange possibly refers to Cenge or Kenge, Umbundu speakers in the central plateau of Angola. Mutumo Angola might be a misspelling of Mutemo, but there is also a river called Mutumo in Angola. Further research is needed to confirm the meaning of these terms with any certainty.¹³⁴

4.6 Stereotypes

Slave owners in Brazil and other New World colonies created stereotypes of slaves originating in different regions of Africa. *Mineiro* slave owners were no exception. At the outset, it must be noted that these stereotypes were created by slave merchants and masters for the purposes of the slave trade and did not necessarily reflect African perceptions. To some extent they must have been shaped by supply mechanisms and market conditions on the African coast. Ship captains and merchants always tried to attach the best possible attributes to the slaves they were selling. Slaves embarking in popular ports were advertised with the best possible characteristics. Owners' experiences in the New World were another factor that shaped the stereotypes. If a group of slaves from a certain region rebelled, others arriving from the same region were easily stereotyped as rebellious. Owners in different colonies also exchanged information with each

¹³³ Rezende 2006, p. 180, Appendix, Tabela A.

¹³⁴ I am grateful to Daniel Domingues da Silva for his insight on many of the terms discussed above. Daniel Domingues da Silva, personal communication, 20 August 2011.

other, so that the stereotypes prevailing in a certain part of the Americas did not necessarily originate in that colony. Like all stereotypes of the ‘other’, these perceptions were based on generalizations.¹³⁵ Stereotypes hid the fact that each region supplied all kinds of individuals with different natures and skills.

The major division in the owners’ perception of slaves in colonial Brazil was between Central Africans and West Africans. Mattoso, in her history of slavery in Brazil, wrote that a slave’s origin did not influence the sale price, although some masters preferred slaves from certain regions for certain kinds of jobs. She contended that West Africans “were reputed to make good servants”, while Central Africans “were supposed to be good farm hands, as well as being gentle and docile.”¹³⁶ As will be seen, these stereotypes were only partially true in the case of Minas Gerais. Further, slave stereotypes were not written in stone and changed over time,¹³⁷ as can easily be seen in the case of eighteenth-century Minas Gerais. As Russell-Wood has noted, slave fashions changed dramatically in the early eighteenth century. In 1700, slaves from the Mina Coast were held in low repute and plantation owners preferred to buy only Angolan slaves. In the 1730s, the converse held true and Central Africans were shunned. According to Russell-Wood, the decisive factor was that the working of gold and diamonds “demanded more slaves than Angola could supply, and those endowed with greater physical resistance.”¹³⁸

One of the best known descriptions of slave stereotypes in eighteenth-century Brazil was recorded by the Italian Jesuit Antonil, whose account described agricultural industries in Bahia and gold mining in Minas Gerais. Antonil first warned sugar-mill owners that they should select their slaves carefully because Africans came from various “nations” and possessed different physical characteristics.

“Those who come to Brazil are of the Ardas, Minas, and Congo nations. Others are from São Tomé, Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, the latter arriving on ships from India. The Ardas and Minas slaves are robust, whereas those from Cape Verde and São Tomé are weaker. Slaves from Angola who grow up in Luanda are more capable of learning mechanical trades than those from the other places mentioned. Among the Congos, there are also some who are rather industrious and useful not only for field service, but also for the various crafts and for household management.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵ The social scientific literature on stereotypes is vast but summarized in Macrae, Stangor and Hewstone, eds., 1996. For an historical perspective, see Gilman 1985.

¹³⁶ Mattoso 1986, pp. 72-73.

¹³⁷ Lara 2007, p. 235.

¹³⁸ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 28.

¹³⁹ Antonil 2001 [1711], p. 91, as translated in Conrad 1984, p. 56.

Antonil thus implied that West Africans, Ardas and Minas, were most suitable for hard physical labor because of their robustness. On the contrary, Central Africans, or at least those from Luanda, were suitable for tasks that required precision. No doubt because of their long experience of Portuguese culture and processes of creolization in their homelands, many Central Africans had already learned such skills before embarking from Angola. Antonil's stereotyping is most favorable with regards to Congo slaves, who he characterized as suitable for field service and crafts as well as domestic work. Antonil, of course, did not invent these stereotypes himself but they reflected those prevailing among slave owners in Bahia. Given that Antonil's work was published just as the mining boom in Minas Gerais was gaining momentum, these stereotypes no doubt affected the market behavior of *mineiro* slave owners. The most important expression in Antonil's description is therefore the robustness of West African slaves. Gold mining required hard physical labor, and West Africans were deemed the most capable of such work.

At the same time, however, a conflicting view was expressed in a document relating to the slave trade directed to Minas Gerais. A royal letter of 1711 explained that there was a higher price for slaves coming from Angola than from the Mina coast, because the Angolan slaves were deemed superior to Mina workers. Three years later, however, the situation had shifted in favor of West Africans. The miners' experience had allegedly shown that Mina slaves were stronger and more capable of working in the conditions to which they were imported.¹⁴⁰ In a short time, Mina slaves seem to have become more popular among *mineiros* because of their physical strength, but some have sought to explain the preference for Minas by other factors.

Some historians of colonial Brazil have argued that West Africans were favored in Minas Gerais because of their expertise in gold mining. For example, Paiva has argued that the slaves who embarked on the Mina Coast already carried with them a tradition and knowledge of gold and iron mining and possessed the techniques needed in the mining of these metals. According to him, the Portuguese colonizers were simply trying to man the gold mines with specialized workers who already possessed the know-how needed in mining.¹⁴¹ This argument is by no means novel. It can be traced back at least to Charles Boxer's seminal work on "the golden age of Brazil". According to Boxer, "[s]ome of the mining techniques were apparently of West African origin, for the Portuguese evidently knew less about mining than did some of their slaves from the Western Sudan."¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Luna 1980, p. 85.

¹⁴¹ Paiva 2002.

¹⁴² Boxer 1962, p. 184.

Boxer's argument, however, has not been universally accepted. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda has argued that gold mining in Minas Gerais was not influenced by African mining techniques. Rather, the *Paulista* explorers who found the first gold deposits in the Brazilian interior already possessed the necessary mining instruments since these had been used in Europe for centuries.¹⁴³ Gonçalves, balancing between the two positions in her article on mining techniques in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, has pointed to the similar techniques that were used both in West Africa and Minas Gerais. However, she has also reminded that Mina slaves could have been preferred because of their physical strength. She concludes that Africans showed themselves to be especially capable of the tasks of extracting and processing gold as well as of supervising this work.¹⁴⁴

When evaluating the African contribution to gold mining in Brazil, it would be worthwhile to look at the African perspective on gold mining. The washing of the rivers for gold in Akan areas of the Gold Coast was of considerable antiquity, and reports of pits driven deep into the ground had reached Europe by the end of the fifteenth century. The Akan were drawn into the world economy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries after the Portuguese began the construction of the fort of São Jorge da Mina, later simply called Elmina, located in modern Ghana in 1482.¹⁴⁵ Working the gold deposits was one of the principal functions of slaves in the interior of the Gold Coast. The Akan were experienced gold miners and explored the veins of gold in the mines to a considerable depth. They used iron hoes, baskets and strong ropes to dig steps and galleries in the ground. The soil that was dug-up was taken by the slaves in large wooden dishes to the nearest water and piled there in large heaps for panning. Asante rose as a dominant power in the late seventeenth century and continued the practice of using slaves in gold production, amassing large numbers of dependants to work in the mines.¹⁴⁶

The fact that slave labor was so central to the Asante economy and to the functioning of their gold mines raises questions about the availability of specialized slaves and the willingness of African rulers to sell them into the Atlantic economy. It is beyond comprehension why Asante rulers would have been willing to part with their skilled mining slaves unless they sold them for high prices. The power of the Asante in the early eighteenth century also excludes the possibility that they would have lost their slaves in warfare or to raiders. It can further be argued that the number of gold mining slaves on

¹⁴³ Holanda 1985a, p. 240; idem., 1985b, p. 274.

¹⁴⁴ Gonçalves 2007, pp. 195-198.

¹⁴⁵ Wilks 1993, pp. 4-8, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Lovejoy 2000, p. 121. On the rise of Asante, see Wilks 1993 and McCaskie 1995. The question of whether gold mining was carried out by slave or free labor has been debated in Dumett 1979 and 2010, and Terray 1983.

the Gold Coast would not have satisfied the demand for slaves in the Brazilian mines. The popularity of West African slaves, especially those denominated Minas, in the first half of the eighteenth century in Minas Gerais has to be explained by other factors.

Although gold mining was a specialized activity, the skills and technology had to be easily transmitted to others. As was true on the Gold Coast and also in Minas Gerais, mining was risky for the workers involved in it. What mattered more was that lost miners could be easily replaced by new slaves. While it is probable that West African mining techniques were to some extent transferred by West African slaves to Brazil, to say that all Mina slaves in Minas Gerais were already experienced gold miners in Africa is clearly an exaggeration. It is more likely that there were some specialized gold miners among the West Africans, who passed their knowledge onwards after arriving in the interior of Brazil. But if the alleged mining skills do not explain the popularity of West Africans in Minas Gerais, what other factors could have caused their popularity among *mineiros*?

Russell-Wood has argued that West Africans, the majority of who arrived in Brazil from ports along the Bight of Benin, predominated in the early phases of mining because they were reputed to be better workers, more resistant to disease, and stronger than Angolan slaves.¹⁴⁷ The “robustness” thesis is supported by Gonçalves who hinted that physical superiority of the West Africans could have been a factor leading to their widespread demand in Minas Gerais.¹⁴⁸ Whether they truly were that much better suited physically for mining labor than Central Africans is questionable, but at least West Africans enjoyed a much more positive stereotype in this respect. Stereotyping in this case could be conceptualized as a type of pre-modern advertising that, if nothing else, served the purposes of Bahian traders, who imported slaves from West Africa.

But there was more to West African slaves than their physical characteristics. This is suggested by a correspondence between the governor of Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon’s *Conselho Ultramarino* between 1725 and 1728. In July 1726, the governor of Rio de Janeiro wrote to the king that “Mina blacks have a better reputation in [mining] work, [and] *mineiros* say that they are the strongest and most vigorous”. However, the governor thought that Mina slaves had this reputation because “they are said to be witches and they have introduced the devil so that only they find gold”. For this reason, there was not a single man in Minas Gerais who could live without a Mina slave woman, the governor concluded.¹⁴⁹ It was thus reputed that Mina slaves had almost a supernatural capacity to find gold. Perhaps this reputation, imagined or not,

¹⁴⁷ Russell-Wood 2002, p. 113.

¹⁴⁸ Gonçalves 2007, p. 197.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Lara 2007, pp. 225-226.

was more crucial to the preference of *mineiros* to buy West Africans than their skills in gold mining. In sum, positive stereotypes of Mina slaves among slave owners in Minas Gerais contributed to their popularity in the first half of the eighteenth century. Where these stereotypes originated is a harder question to answer, but they might have been propagated and strongly advocated by Bahian slave traders.

In the mid-century, Mina slaves continued to be esteemed in Minas Gerais. A letter written by Tomás Francisco Xavier Hares to the King D. José I in 1752 gives a clear indication that *mineiros* valued slaves from the Mina coast because they considered them more suitable than other Africans. However, this preference did not only concern mining slaves, but slaves employed in any activity. Hares, worried of the growing debts of *mineiros* to the Bahian merchants, suggested that Mina slaves could be easily replaced by Moçambique slaves. Although he deemed Moçambiques inferior to Mina slaves, Hares maintained that East Africans could do all the same tasks as West Africans.¹⁵⁰ He thus suggested that there was no real reason for the Mina preference among slave owners. Although not giving too much importance to a single testimony and generalizing that Hares' view was shared by all *mineiros*, this document still points to the appreciative stereotypes that prevailed in Minas Gerais about West Africans.

If Mina slaves were stereotyped as strong and robust workers, the same cannot be said of Central Africans. Viceroy Vasco Fernandes César de Menezes, Count of Sabugosa, commented in 1719 that Angolas were not preferred by *mineiros* because they died easily or committed suicide.¹⁵¹ Six years later the viceroy wrote that slaves from Angola were reputed to be totally unsuitable for anything but domestic labor.¹⁵² All this hints at physical inferiority of Central Africans, but this stereotype was not supported by all *mineiros*, because Central Africans continued to arrive in Minas Gerais in substantial numbers even in the first half of the eighteenth century and already predominated in the slave population in the 1740s.

Two positive stereotypes that contributed to the continued presence of Central Africans in Minas Gerais were their suitability for “mechanical trades” (as pronounced by Antonil) and their obedience. The latter characteristic was proclaimed by King D. João V himself in a letter sent to the governor of Minas Gerais, D. Lourenço de Almeida in 1725. The correspondence concerned an

¹⁵⁰ AHU, Minas Gerais, Cx. 60, doc. 76.

¹⁵¹ Rezende 2006, p. 136.

¹⁵² Russell-Wood 2002, p. 113. Although I have not consulted the original document cited by Russell-Wood (Sabugosa to King, 23 February 1726, Arquivo Público da Bahia (APB), ‘Ordens régias’, vol. 20, doc. 105a), I would suggest that the viceroy was purposefully trying to defend Bahian traders active mainly on the coast of West Africa or that this stereotype of Angolas as incapable workers was spread by Bahian merchants in order to increase the popularity of the slaves they supplied.

unsuccessful slave uprising in Minas Gerais in the early 1720s, after which the king recommended that only slaves from Angola should be imported to the mining regions because they had proved to be “more obedient than Minas whose ferocity and fearlessness” might lead them to oppose whites.¹⁵³ The king’s opinion was that Central Africans were more submissive than West Africans. These stereotypes no doubt affected the market behavior of some *mineiros* who preferred to buy West Africans to work in the mines and employ Central Africans in other sectors of the economy, although Central Africans were certainly employed in the mines as well. There are no clues to how these stereotypes changed in the second half of the eighteenth century as the gold boom waned, but the Central African majority in the slave population during this period suggests that the perceived differences of slaves from different African regions were not as marked as before. It must also be emphasized that stereotypes do not fully explain the preference for slaves from a certain region, but that market supply mechanisms in Africa and competition between Bahian and *Carioca* slave traders played a far more important role.

Outside the mining region, Central Africans were usually perceived in positive terms. Karasch has argued that, in nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro, slave owners had positive images of Angolans. Foreign travelers and visitors to Rio de Janeiro commented that Angolas made excellent slaves, perhaps because they were less prone to revolt than the Minas. In contrast to prevalent stereotypes in Minas Gerais, the good physical condition of Central Africans was cited by one traveler as a reason for their popularity. According to Karasch, Angolas were also esteemed for their ability to do mechanical and other skilled work. From the slave owners’ perspective, Congos also made some of the best slaves. They were esteemed for their skills in agriculture, crafts, and domestic work. Congo women were particularly reputed to be hard workers.¹⁵⁴

It is interesting to compare Brazilian stereotypes of Central Africans with those prevalent in other colonies of the New World. As Littlefield has noted for North America, “Englishmen made various attempts in the eighteenth century to characterize in terms of temperament and disposition peoples from the various regions that contributed slaves to New World plantations.” Enslaved Central Africans were characterized as “docile, comely, not especially strong, possessed of a peculiar predisposition towards the mechanic arts, but inclined to run away.”¹⁵⁵ The similarities between North American and Brazilian stereotypes concerning slaves from certain African regions are striking. Littlefield, who has compared these stereotypes, has argued that

¹⁵³ APM, Seção Colonial, Códice 23, f. 47.

¹⁵⁴ Karasch 1987, pp. 18-19.

¹⁵⁵ Littlefield 1991 [1981], pp. 11-13.

“[w]hatever personal prejudices, historical precedents, or psychological or sociological predeterminants modified Portuguese perceptions in seventeenth-century Brazil, by the eighteenth century their observations of the physical capabilities of various slave types agreed largely with those made by the English. French and Dutch appraisals seemed likewise coincident.”¹⁵⁶

Berlin has argued that, in the North American lowcountry, planters took the regional origins of slaves into account when deciding which ones to purchase. Experience and a considered understanding of the physical and social character of various African nations helped some planters in their decisions, while shallow stereotypes influenced other planters in choosing from among the human merchandise. Sometimes, just by being unobtainable, those slaves who were the hardest to get were also those most desired. Whatever their preferences, slaveholders could not bend the international market to their will, so even in North America, African supply mechanisms determined from which regions slaves were obtained in sufficient numbers to satisfy the New World demand.¹⁵⁷

Overall, the image of Central Africans in eighteenth-century Atlantic world was a positive one. They were appreciated as adaptable workers who were especially prone to learn artisanal skills. However, this stereotype did not raise their popularity in the most aggressive phase of gold mining in Minas Gerais in the 1720s and 1730s, when West African Mina slaves were preferred by *mineiros*. It is questionable to what extent the stereotypes reflected the real abilities of slaves from different African regions. They should rather be considered as marketing propaganda that was spread by slave traders in different Brazilian port towns. Also, far more important than the positive images was simply the question of availability of slaves in different years.

4.7 Conclusion

The question of African identities in the New World slave societies has been a contested issue. Historians of slavery in Brazil have generally tended to view African identities that emerged in colonial Brazil as identities imposed from the outside by slave traders and owners. However, the discussions have become more diverse with new contributions by scholars who have sought to study the notions of African identity found in Brazilian documents in more detail. Arguably, the study of African identities in Brazil can gain a lot from

¹⁵⁶ Littlefield 1991 [1981], p. 16.

¹⁵⁷ Berlin 1998, p. 145.

comparisons with studies on slave identity in other parts of the Americas, and from studies of identities in Africa during the era of the Atlantic slave trade.¹⁵⁸

In order to understand the different Central African identities that emerged in colonial Minas Gerais, it is necessary to study how Central Africans conceptualized their identities before the act of enslavement in their homelands. An individual's loyalties rarely extended beyond one's own lineage and village. However, in the eighteenth century, Central Africans, especially those living in the core areas of the *Reino de Angola*, were becoming increasingly aware that they were nominal subjects of the Portuguese colony of Angola. The notion of Angola identity was not completely alien to the individuals who embarked on the Atlantic crossing in Luanda, or the city of Angola, as they called it. There is clear evidence that an Angola identity was adopted by people in Luanda and in the interior where individuals were also coming to terms with the shaping of the Portuguese colony. Similar processes were taking place in Benguela. The political and religious heritage of the kingdom of Kongo provided the framework for the shaping of Congo identity.

Although enslaved Central Africans never completely lost their former identities, they were deeply transformed by their experiences as slaves. Angola, Congo, and Benguela identities began to take shape on African soil even before these unfortunate individuals were shipped to Brazil. The common experience of the Middle Passage forged deep bonds between shipmates or *malungos*, as they called each other. Central Africans successfully continued to cultivate these personal relations in Minas Gerais and maintained their religious traditions even as slaves, as will be argued in the remaining chapters.

¹⁵⁸ The study of historical identities in Africa is still in its infancy, as pointed out by Thornton 2010.

5 Honoring Ancestors and Eating Salt: The Meeting between Traditional Religious Life and the Catholic Church

In October 1756, in one of the villages of the parish of Curral del Rei in Minas Gerais, ecclesiastical visitors recorded denunciations against the local chaplain Manoel da Costa de Araujo. One of the accusations against him was that he had refused to administer the last sacraments to a slave who had recently arrived from Angola. The slave's owner, Custodio Pereira da Rocha, had called the chaplain to his house to absolve the slave who was mortally ill. However, the chaplain had claimed that the illness was not fatal and expressed doubt as to whether the slave had been baptized in the first place. However, the young Angolan slave, who did not speak Portuguese, had said that he was a Christian and that he "had already eaten salt", meaning that he had received baptism. His words were translated by a woman slave, apparently originating in the same Central African region, who was able to convey the dying slave's wish to his master. As hard as the slave and his master pleaded, it was to no avail, and the slave died without the last sacraments.¹

While the Central African slave who died was a proclaimed Christian, in the next village attended by the visitors they encountered a slave from Benguela who seemed to lie at the other end of the religious spectrum. Manoel Benguela, a slave owned by Ignácio Xavier, was said to have a set of dolls and pots in his or his partner's – Francisca Correa, who was a black *forra* and lived in a consensual union with Manoel – house, around which he performed his "feasts and *calundus*". According to the witnesses, Manoel's dolls and pots were dedicated to Zumbi, "whom he adores as his god". However, in Manoel's case the ecclesiastics could not be sure of the events as one of the witnesses claimed that Manoel and Francisca in fact adored Saint Benedict in her house. While four other witnesses emphasized that Manoel adored Zumbi, it is not inconceivable that Manoel and Francisca had both African and Catholic images as objects of adoration. Manoel also had a reputation as a healer. On one occasion he had lifted a brand out of a fire, cast it into water, and then washed a sick *crioula* girl with the water.²

¹ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Z-8, ff. 84v-86.

² AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Z-8, ff. 96-98.

These short depositions point to three important aspects of identity formation and religiosity in West Central Africa and colonial Minas Gerais. First, as discussed in the preceding chapter, Central Africans could and did communicate in their African languages in Brazil. In this way, even newly arrived slaves could form bonds with others who spoke a mutually intelligible Bantu language. Second, it is clear that some West Central Africans, before their embarkation to the Americas, had adopted a strong Catholic identity to the degree that they demanded sacraments and other spiritual services in their new home communities. At the same time, it is clear that others retained their indigenous religious practices. Third, while in the first case the anonymous Central African slave had chosen Christian practice over African beliefs, Manoel Benguela's case hints at the more common solution: the mixing of both religious traditions. As discussed in this chapter, such syncretistic mixing had begun on African soil.

Religion was at the heart of eighteenth-century societies, whether Portuguese, Brazilian or African. Understanding the spiritual life of Central Africans is fundamental to understanding how individuals grappled with the dilemmas of everyday life and how slaves sought to heal the traumas of violence experienced during the Middle Passage and in slavery in the Americas. Religious beliefs and practices were the foremost instruments through which Central Africans sought to perceive and confront the difficulties that arose in their home societies. Especially important were the beliefs about human relationships with supernatural powers. As Gray has explained, one of the deepest and most enduring desires of all African societies was the anxiety to eliminate evil. Evil could be produced by a failure to respect ancestors or other supernatural forces, and by breaking common taboos. Perhaps the greatest threats were the evil of witchcraft and the misuse of spiritual power by individuals seized by jealousy, hatred, envy or malice. Protection against such evil was expected to be provided by a wide range of religious specialists.³

Whereas the preceding chapters have discussed the origins of slaves and examined African group identities as they were manifested in the different "nations" in Minas Gerais, the remaining chapters concentrate on a specific aspect of an individual's identity, namely religious sentiment. The question that is central to this treatment of the subject is how enslavement affected the religious identity of Central Africans who were taken to Minas Gerais. In order to provide a comprehensive answer, the variety of religious beliefs and practices that prevailed in West Central Africa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must be outlined, beginning by discussing the basic elements found in Central African cosmologies, or what Sweet calls the core beliefs and practices.⁴ This

³ Gray 1990, pp. 2-5. See also, Craemer, Vansina and Fox 1976.

⁴ Sweet 2003, pp. 103-117 and passim.

is followed by a discussion of how these basic elements were affected by the spread of Catholicism, first in the kingdom of Kongo, and second, in the rest of the Angolan region.

5.1 Basic Elements of Central African Religious Life

Religion was a lifeline for all Central Africans. It was a way of explaining, predicting, and controlling events in the world around them. Communion with and the worship of one God was not important, whereas rituals and beliefs were designed to deal directly with the dangers of the world – disease, drought, hunger, sterility, and so on. Sweet has argued that in Africa religion and science were inseparably bound together. In most African cosmologies, herbal cures were regarded as efficient spiritual remedies because their efficacy had been proven time and again. Similarly, the ritual knowledge of the diviners and healers had been ascertained. Westerners would regard the herbal/medicinal success as a scientific truth and attribute the cure to the chemical properties of the herbs. In eighteenth-century Central Africa, people attributed the cure to the spirits. Sweet concludes that in order to understand African cosmologies with any degree of accuracy, scholars have to look at African beliefs and practices in their own context, and not look at Western science as the only valid explanation for African cures and healing rituals.⁵

African religions in the contemporary world have been dealt with extensively,⁶ but these studies cannot be taken as a starting point for the present study because religions are not static, even if some elements have remained in place for centuries. This study will follow the example set by Thornton and Sweet, who have both reconstructed African religious ideas primarily from documents written during the period of the slave trade. The adopted approach provides a more comprehensive picture, taking into account regional variations and change over time. The task is made challenging by the fact, as pointed out by Sweet, that religious practices varied greatly from one ethnic group to another, and even from kinship group to kinship group.⁷ Therefore, any generalizations made from specific case studies based on available sources are problematic. However, such a generalization gleaned from eighteenth-century documentation contained in the archives of the Inquisition will start the description of Central African religious life.

⁵ Sweet 2003, pp. 108-109.

⁶ See, for example, Haar 2009; Olupona (ed.) 2000; Ray 2000; Mbiti 1990.

⁷ Sweet 2003, p. 104.

The books of the General Council (*Conselho Geral*) of the Portuguese Inquisition contain a document named “Pagan Rites of Angola” from 1720.⁸ This document, of unknown authorship, lists ten rituals, many of them cited by their Kimbundu name. All the rituals are listed without reference to a specific location where they would have been practiced. It can be assumed that such a list would have been compiled by a priest stationed in Luanda, combining his local knowledge with stories he had heard from people who had travelled inland, or perhaps from a priest who had been stationed inland at some time during his ecclesiastical career.⁹ This rather short document is interesting because it claims to give a universal and comprehensive picture of rituals employed by the inhabitants of the Portuguese colony of Angola. Various points mentioned in the list can be used to open the discussion of religious life in this region.

The list mentions many rituals that are well-known for the Angolan region and are also discussed in other written sources from the same era. According to the first item in the list, the poison ordeal *golungo* was used to find out who had or had not committed a certain crime. Second, *kibandu* was a ritual used by women to divine the future. Third, certain cords were used in a ritual which helped to bring escaped slaves back to their master. Fourth, burial rites named *tambes* were practiced by the blacks of the city (here, a clear reference to Luanda) in their dwellings. This meant a large gathering of people, playing of musical instruments, abundant food and drink, and the presence of a ritual specialist to take care of the needs of the deceased. Fifth, male circumcision was practiced by blacks, even if baptized, because otherwise women would not sleep with them. Sixth, adoration of a goat, named *caçuto*, was practiced during the night with great noise created by drumming. Seventh, various statues of deceased relatives, or *kitekes*, were adored and sustained as if they were living. Eighth, various taboos called *kijillas*, called superstitions by the author, were observed as they had been handed down by earlier generations. These included taboos not to eat certain foods or touch certain things, otherwise the transgressor would die or be paralyzed. Ninth, various “witcheries” named *ganganzambes* were used to “kill or give life”, and to bring “hate or love”. Tenth, various Ambundo cures involving magic were used by people seeking alleviation from illness. The cures consisted of “natural remedies” but always

⁸ Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício, Inquisição, Livro 272, Ritos gentílicos de Angolla, ff. 123-123v, and a copy of the same on ff. 236-236v.

⁹ According to Sweet 2003, p. 252, n. 18, the document was written in Rio de Janeiro in 1720, and describes religious practices of Angolan slaves in Rio. There is a similar, though more extensive document, entitled “Ritos gentílicos, e superstições, que observão os negros do gentio do Reino de Angola desde o seu nascimento até a morte”, in the Biblioteca Pública de Évora, Códice CXVI_2-15, peça n. 17, crafted in the early eighteenth century by the Bishop of Angola and Congo, D. Luis Simões Brandão. These two documents are different in style but it is possible that Brandão also authored the document found in the Inquisition archives. It is also thinkable that the anonymous document was compiled from several sources by someone who had never set foot in Angola.

included “a certain number of ceremonies”. The author also claimed that many whites took part in these rituals by seeking advice from healers or *Golungo* specialists. They also gave their consent to *tambes* or burial rituals in Luanda.¹⁰

To summarize, this document by an anonymous author indicates that religious rituals were an integral part of daily life in West Central Africa. People went to ritual specialists, usually referred to as *nganga* or *ganga*, to find out who was guilty of offenses, to divine the future, and to find escaped slaves. Moreover, people observed various restrictions concerning cuisine and material life. Transitions from one stage of life to another were marked by rituals, such as circumcision for boys entering adulthood. Funerals and their correct execution marked a transition from this world to the world of their ancestors, whose memory the living kept alive by paying homage to statues representing the deceased. The spirits of ancestors and deities were instrumental in guaranteeing luck in social relations, whether involving amorous or odious feelings. Throughout their lives, people also resorted to healers in order to retain their health. Healers, in turn, resorted not only to natural medicine but also to the spirit world in order to provide potent cures.

Thornton has called Central African cosmology the process of continuous revelation and precarious priesthood. A priesthood that could have enforced orthodoxy on religious matters did not exist. Rather, theology was formed by a constant stream of revelations and interpreted individually within a community of belief. Even though there never was full agreement or religious orthodoxy, a few widely held beliefs characterized Central African religious life. Peoples of this region believed in two types of distinct spiritual beings residing in the Other World. First were the souls of recently deceased ancestors that affected daily life in many ways. In addition to these, Central Africans believed in remote and powerful spirits or deities. According to Thornton, there were also two categories of lesser spirits, which were unattached to individual families or territories, and which either activated charms that could be used by anyone possessing the charm or were angry and malicious spirits whose malevolence and enmity could be dangerous.¹¹

Missionaries in West Central Africa listed several deities that held universal or more often regional authority. They considered Nzambi Mpungu, the high god and creator of the universe, as a former ancestor, who was accepted by the missionaries in Kongo as being the same as the Christian God. Nzambi Mpungu was not the subject of a specific cult or worship, though his immanence was accepted. In Mbundu regions, the deities were typically called *kilundu*, but sometimes they were clearly seen as gods and named *nzambi* (pl. *jinzambi*).

¹⁰ Conselho Geral do Santo Ofício, Inquisição, Livro 272, ff. 123-123v, and a copy of the same on ff. 236-236v.

¹¹ Thornton 2002, pp. 73-75.

According to Thornton, Central Africans often worshipped territorial deities, if not *nzambi*, at shrines called *kiteki* in the Kimbundu speaking areas, although in the above-mentioned Inquisition document, *kiteke/kiteki* refers to the images of ancestral spirits. These deities held the well-being of specific areas in their power, and people considered their general welfare as being under the protection of these territorial deities. Shrines were given first fruits in exchange for abundant harvests – they were also said to bring hunters success, and the ruler good luck in his wars and alliances. These shrines were usually placed in houses or complexes of buildings.¹²

Missionary reports from the seventeenth century indicate that, in the kingdom of Kongo, people worshipped “idols” to whom they had dedicated “houses of idols”, probably shrines to territorial deities called *kiteki*. Religious specialists called *nganga kiteki* were dedicated to serving these deities. Thornton has argued that in the Christian Kongo the merging of the functions of shrines with Christian churches complicated the situation. However, he notes that priests known as *kitomi* were regularly mentioned in seventeenth-century correspondence, relating to territorial deities, called *nkita*, that were honored in shrines. *Nkita* were territorial deities responsible for natural events and public morality. The *kitomi*, who travelled widely and were frequently subjects of denunciation by the missionaries, were not restricted to Kongo – for example, one “Mani Quitome”, who was believed to have control of the rain, was arrested near the Bengo in the Kimbundu-speaking region in the 1650s.¹³

Hilton, in her interpretation of Kongo cosmology, has argued that two types of deity were revered in the kingdom of Kongo. A division was made between the *mbumba* dimension of the water and earth spirits on the one hand and the *nkadi mpemba* dimension of the sky spirits on the other hand. The *mbumba* dimension was first and foremost concerned with the farmers’ crucial requirement, fertility. This dimension was expressed in a number of beliefs and rituals involving a giant snake, water, trees, fire, as well as individual water and earth spirits. The power of the *mbumba* dimension, representing the natural world, was ambivalent. Harmonious behavior was rewarded with fecundity and good health but disobedience could lead to sterility and disease. The water and earth spirits sometimes manifested in unusually shaped objects of the natural world, such as a stone or a piece of wood. These objects were regarded as *nkisi*, containers of spirit power. The powers of the *nkadi mpemba* dimension were concerned with the social and cultural world of man. The expression of *nkadi mpemba*-type power was more problematic than that of the *mbumba* dimension. Whereas the *mbumba*-type spirits were served by *nganga*, seen as altruistic and including women as well as men, the *nkadi mpemba*-type *nganga*

¹² Thornton 2002, pp. 75-77.

¹³ Thornton 2002, pp. 78.

were exclusively male and used their powers to benefit individuals and public authorities within the cultural world of man. Many of them were experts in discovering evil-doers. The most important of these were the *nganga ngombe*, diviners who sought out witches. Many *nganga* specialized in bringing good fortune to individuals, in protecting them against evil and misfortune, and in curing them from illness.¹⁴

An important aspect of the public cult of the *mbumba* water and earth spirits was the practice, which existed in many parts of Central Africa, of hanging *nkisi* or charms in an *nsanda* tree. According to Hilton, people spend time revering them and considered it an enormous crime to remove any branch from the tree, even if it was dead. Some of the specialists of the *mbumba* dimension used the *nsanda* tree in ceremonies designed to enable women to become pregnant and to have an easy delivery. Some villages had palm trees dedicated to deities which were ornamented in diverse ways. Only those chosen to guard the palms could eat the fruit or drink the wine from the trees. In Wandu, Kongo's southeastern province, the local leader performed certain ceremonies every four days in honor of the water and earth spirits. In the Nsundi province, the principal wife of *mani* Nsundi had two 'superstitious trees' near the house.¹⁵

Such practices were not limited to Kikongo speaking areas. In Mbundu areas, *nsanda* trees were called *mulembas*. According to Cadornega's account, *mulemba* trees abounded throughout Angola and were revered by the people, who used to make sacrifices to, and "consult", them. The trees angered the Portuguese who sometimes ordered them to be cut down. For example, Governor Francisco de Tavora (1669-1676) sent an expedition from Luanda to cut down one such tree in Bengo.¹⁶

In Luanda, an African woman named Mariana Fernandes was denounced to the Inquisition in the 1720s for revering a tree in a garden on the Island of Luanda. The island was a place where the wealthy inhabitants of Luanda spent their leisure time, enjoying the cool shade provided by its coconut and date palms.¹⁷ Mariana owned a small garden on the island. There, she used the services of a black healer named Simão, who was said to be a "master of *quilundos*", and was "dedicated" to that tree. In Angola, *kilundu* was a generic name for any spirit that possessed the living. Mariana had used his services when trying to cure her son from an infirmity, and she had two female slaves who were often possessed as well. The witnesses also claimed that Mariana used magical means to attract men. She had been married previously, but after her husband disappeared, she had lived with four different lovers. At the time

¹⁴ Hilton 1985, pp. 12-18.

¹⁵ Hilton 1985, pp. 14, 49.

¹⁶ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, pp. 65-66.

¹⁷ Curto 2004, p. 174.

of the denunciation she lived with a certain Andre Ferreira Gil, a Portuguese man who had already married in Lisbon. The proceedings did not clarify what purpose the tree served for Mariana Fernandes, but it was deemed dangerous nevertheless. The tree was cut down on the orders of the bishop of Angola.¹⁸

Territorial deities were also esteemed in the interior of the Portuguese colony of Angola. Two important deities, Kibuku and Muta Kalombo, were mentioned in the mid-eighteenth century in an Inquisition case involving João Pereira da Cunha, the former captain-major of the Ambaca *presídio*. It was claimed that Cunha had worshiped these deities although this was never proven in the ensuing investigation. However, the denunciations against Cunha pointed out the importance of these spirits for the people of Ambaca. Kibuku was known in Ambaca as a spirit that brought good fortune, and was the god of wealth for entrepreneurs. As Vansina has argued, local African leaders frequently invoked Kibuku and observed the requirements of this spirit. Muta Kalombo was venerated in Ambaca as a personal spirit that guaranteed luck in hunting and warfare.¹⁹ These spirits remained important to the local population for centuries. Muta Kalombo had been mentioned in a letter written by a Capuchin missionary in 1656, and Portuguese soldiers testified to its importance in the mid-nineteenth century. Territorial deities thus enjoyed longevity over time.²⁰

The case against João Pereira da Cunha and his accomplices also revealed how the activation of charms was connected to these spirits. João Pedro, a religious specialist arrested in Ambaca for his involvement in the case, owned numerous objects of ritual significance. These were confiscated and listed by the soldiers who made the arrest. João Pedro had a *macua* and a buffalo tail that were dedicated to Muta Calombo. However, João Pedro's main devotion was directed to a spirit called Macongo, and objects pertaining to this spirit were the most numerous. These included three charm packages in pots (*basouras*) with red and white legs, a small clapperless bell (*gonguinha*) filled with pale brown powder, and five bones and shells, another *gonguinha* filled with feathers and a shell, a rosary made of shells, nine small bones, and packs of red and pale brown powder, and a third *gonguinha* filled with a black feather, five bones, a rosary of shells, pale brown powder, and a piece of wood. Another man who was arrested for his connection with the case was Felipe Dias Chaves, who also owned a *macua* and a buffalo tail dedicated to Muta Calombo. Besides these, he had numerous other objects that were dedicated to the same spirit. A belt to which had been attached a leather pouch full of black powder, two small horns, three iron rings and two bones, were all confiscated from Chaves. It is a

¹⁸ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5888.

¹⁹ Vansina 2005, p. 25.

²⁰ Kananoja 2010, pp. 446-447.

pity that these men did not reveal in detail how these different charms were put to use.²¹

In West Central Africa, secular structures were intimately bound to religious ideas. Sweet has argued that “[p]olitical, social, economic, and cultural ideologies were all animated by a tightly woven cosmology that explained the origins of the universe, the constitution of the person, and the connections between the worlds of the living and the dead.” Especially important was the division of the universe between the world of the living and the world of the dead, which was maintained in all local religious traditions. Souls of the dead moved on to the realm of the dead to join the souls of deceased ancestors, but they never completely abandoned the world of the living. Ancestral spirits remained engaged in the everyday lives of surviving kinsmen, and were believed to be among the most powerful influences in shaping the destinies of their surviving kin. According to Sweet, the living and the dead formed a single community and were socially and morally obliged to each other – ancestors protected the living, but in turn they expected to be loved and remembered.²²

The spirits of dead ancestors were honored and respected. The ancestors’ sphere of activity was their descendants rather than whole regions or territories. Looking after them was family oriented with descendants typically forming the group that dedicated themselves to attending to their ancestors, and in exchange receiving good luck and health or, if they were nonchalant, sickness and misfortune. In the Inquisition document “Pagan Rites of Angola”, the images of the dead were called *kitekes*. The anonymous author claimed that people adored these images and said that “this is my son, this is my father, this is my brother, etc.” The images were offered full-board as if they were alive.²³ In Mbundu areas it was noted that ancestors might be offended if they were not offered enough, and punish the living by killing children or causing bad luck. In Kongo, even long after Christianity was introduced, people turned to ancestors for good luck in war and other events, and before departing to war, prostrated themselves at the tombs of the ancestors, praying for aid and strength.²⁴ Graves were the principal medium through which the living maintained contact with the dead.²⁵ Thus, a good deal of religious activity was family oriented and often centered on the graves of ancestors, where people went to seek protection and support.²⁶

²¹ Kananoja 2010, p. 453.

²² Sweet 2003, p. 104. Similar beliefs about the importance of the ancestors and the worlds of the living and the dead were not completely alien to Portugal at the same time, as shown by Paiva 1997, pp. 100, 120. For examples of similar beliefs in Europe during the Middle Ages, see Le Roy Ladurie 1984, pp. 53-55, 327-328, 332.

²³ Conselho Gerald o Santo Oficio, Inquisição, Livro 272, f. 123.

²⁴ Thornton 2002, pp. 79-80.

²⁵ Hilton 1985, p. 11.

²⁶ Thornton 2007, p. 96.

Central Africans believed that the worlds of the living and the dead were separated by a large body of water through which the dead had to pass in order to reach the Other World.²⁷ Bodies of water were commonly associated with the world of the dead, and according to Cavazzi, Central Africans engaged in certain rituals – greeting the water, drinking some of it, and tracing signs on their chests with clay from the ground beneath – before crossing lakes or rivers.²⁸ Although it was widely believed that the soul passed on to the Other World, there were other beliefs as well. Some believed that the soul died with the body. A system of transmigration or reincarnation of souls was widespread in Mbundu belief.²⁹ It was believed that the souls passed from husbands to wives. To prevent this, soon after the death of her husband, a widow completed a ritual at a lake or a river, together with a religious specialist or another widow, to “drown” the husband’s spirit.³⁰

The elaborate rituals that surrounded death point to the importance that people placed on honoring their ancestors in a proper way. These rituals served to detach the living from the immediate influence of the dead person and to ensure that the spirit of the dead did not return to haunt the living.³¹ To aid the souls in their passage to the world of the dead, the bodies were ritually prepared by the relatives. The wealthier and higher in the social hierarchy the dead person had been, the more lavishly the funeral was prepared. The deceased was offered food and drinks, and according to Father Cavazzi, two or three slaves were offered to serve the dead in the afterlife.³² Funeral ceremonies usually took many days. In Kongo, the relatives did not eat anything for three days and kept a strict silence.³³ However, when the body was taken to the grave, one commentator remarked, it seemed more like a great festival than a funeral act.³⁴ The graves of the wealthy and powerful people had pyramids built over them, with a “window” so that the dead person could see out and the living

²⁷ MacGaffey 1986, p. 43.

²⁸ Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, p. 118. Same rituals, with added offerings, were repeated when preparing for fishing.

²⁹ Thornton 2002, p. 74.

³⁰ Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, p. 130. According to Cadornega, 1942, vol. III, p. 266, the widows wore black cloth for this ritual to make a clear distinction between the living and the dead. In West Central African color symbolism, black was the color of This World, and white was the color of the Other World. Hilton 1985, p. 10, describes that, in Kongo, the principal wife conducted the relatives to the nearest river, where she cut the belt that her husband had worn in life and threw it in the river. In this way, the river was thought to carry away the spirit of the deceased.

³¹ Hilton 1985, p. 10.

³² Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, p. 125. See also, *Exploração á Africa*, p. 373, which states that “on the day of his death, some people are killed, and they have to be those who were his immediate servants in life”. Slaves were still buried alive in a chief’s grave in Kongo during the nineteenth century. MacGaffey 1986, p. 29.

³³ Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, p. 129.

³⁴ *Exploração á Africa*, p. 373. This description was given at the beginning of the eighteenth century by the bishop of Angola D. Luis Simões Brandão.

could communicate with the deceased.³⁵ In other cases, a container for liquids with a hole in it was placed on top of the grave to give the dead something to drink. Then, year after year, the relatives came to clean the outside of the grave and to hold an annual banquet.³⁶

People relied on the spirits of the dead to maintain the well-being of the living, appealing to them at grave sites or in other ritual settings where the living made offerings to the dead in exchange for power and protection. Sickness was interpreted as a symbol of failure – spirits invoked illness as punishment for those who failed in their obligations to their deceased kin.³⁷ Besides the wrath of ancestors, the activities of witches were seen as another major cause of misfortune and illness. Thornton has argued that “Central African theology focused on a struggle between good and evil that created an ethical system.” People did not usually envisage evil as the provenance of a specific supernatural being, such as the Devil in Christian theology. Evil was rather thought to result from the actions of people with wicked intentions who resorted to supernatural forces in order to do harm. As Thornton has shown, an array of religious specialists was employed to find out the cause of death, to locate witches and to undo their curses. A diviner titled *nganga ngombo* specialized in finding the cause of death through witchcraft. *Nganga a muloko* had the special function of locating witches and their curses.³⁸

Suspected living witches were ritually judged in a trial or had to undergo an ordeal that they endured only if innocent. The best-known poison ordeal in Kongo involved the use of the bark of a certain tree that was mixed with a counteractive ingredient. It is unlikely that the administering diviner could control the dose, and thus the verdict, with precision.³⁹ The Jesuit father Pedro Tavares described a similar method used in Cacôma along the Bengo River in the second quarter of the seventeenth century. The suspect was given a drink of water with poison mixed in it. If he was innocent, he was not harmed, but if he succumbed to the poison, he was deemed guilty.⁴⁰ This was a common ritual proceeding in much of West Central Africa. In the anonymous Inquisition document examined above, the ritual was called *golungo*. In some places, it was called *mbulungo*. According to Cavazzi, who described various ordeals enacted in Angola in the mid-seventeenth century, *mbulungo* was conducted by a specialist who mixed a variety of powders of herbs and woods with powdered snakes, fruits of various trees, and plants in a calabash or vase that was given to

³⁵ Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, pp. 125-126.

³⁶ Exploração á Africa, p. 373.

³⁷ Sweet 2003, pp. 104-105. For the allegory of witches stealing the souls of their victims, see MacGaffey 1986, p. 162.

³⁸ Thornton 2002, p. 81.

³⁹ MacGaffey 1986, p. 166.

⁴⁰ Exploração á Africa, p. 356.

the suspects. Those who survived the ordeal were deemed innocent.⁴¹ Another ordeal called *kilumbu* that was used in various parts of Central Africa was to put a stone in a pot of boiling liquid, which the accused then tried to pick up from the pot.⁴²

Religious practices pervaded the daily life of Central Africans. A cosmology that divided the universe into the worlds of the living and the dead helped people to interpret temporal phenomena. The help of religious specialists was enlisted to combat all ills that arose from the spirit world. The influence of these specialists was increasingly attacked as Catholic missionaries began their encroachment into Central Africa, first in the kingdom of Kongo, where they had their greatest success, and then in the colony of Angola, as it was carved out by the Portuguese. It is these processes that must now be scrutinized in order to fully comprehend the shaping of religious identities in Central Africa.

5.2 The Impact of Catholicism in the Kingdom of Kongo

5.2.1 Early Development

The Portuguese overseas empire was based on trade and conversion. The spreading of Christianity in “pagan” lands proceeded hand in hand with the economic measures that the Portuguese were taking. Traders, soldiers and missionaries penetrated the interior while the administration of the colony was confined to the coastal regions of the newly “discovered” lands. In Central Africa, missionaries were first successful in the kingdom of Kongo, where the local ruler Nzinga a Nkuwu was baptized as João I in 1491. The conversion of Kongo’s ruler was voluntary and the baptism of the king and his major nobles went smoothly.⁴³ The kingdom of Kongo was the area in West Central Africa where Christianity was most firmly established over the next two centuries.

The Catholic Church in Central Africa developed to its apex in the kingdom of Kongo, partly because the local people affected the structure of the Church and its doctrines as much as Europeans did from early on. Christianity was accepted as a syncretistic cult, which facilitated its spread in Kongo. Another factor that made Christianity easily acceptable to the people, and which explains its success, was the participation by the people of Kongo in creating their unique form

⁴¹ Cavazzi 1965, Vol. I, pp. 105-106.

⁴² Exploração á Africa, pp. 356, 356, 372.

⁴³ Thornton 1984, p. 148.

of Christianity. Although João I was reputed to have renounced the faith or at least cooled towards it near the end of his reign, his son Afonso I established Catholicism as the official religion of the kingdom after winning the succession dispute against his half-brother in around 1509. According to Thornton, the main lines of Kongo's adaptation of Christianity occurred during Afonso's reign from 1509 to 1542 or 1543. Afonso studied the tenets of Christianity diligently, reading the considerable literature brought to Kongo by Portuguese priests. He dispatched his son Henrique to Lisbon to learn more. Returning to Kongo, Henrique contributed his part to the development of Christianity in the kingdom, serving as the bishop of Kongo from 1518 to 1531.⁴⁴

Some scholars have argued that the conversion of the Kongo elite to Christianity was politically motivated, as baptism opened new doors to those who accepted it. For example, Miller has argued that conversion to Catholicism had the effect of consolidating commercial and diplomatic relations with Europe, and thus securing the supplies of trade goods on which the Kongo elite increasingly depended.⁴⁵ Hilton has argued that the association of Christianity with Kongo's internal politics was strong from the beginning because Afonso I established Christianity as a royal cult under his direct control. Christianity and its acceptance by the Kongo elite offered the ruler a unique source of spiritual power and legitimacy.⁴⁶ Young has shown that Afonso I not only fomented an infrastructure of royal Catholic practice, but he also harshly sought to rid the country of traditional religious practices by "burning numerous idols" and waging a campaign against shrines.⁴⁷

Reginaldo has also argued that the Kongo elite manipulated the new religious context to get a tighter grip on political control as rulers continued to use Christianity to strengthen their kingship. The elite tried to guarantee their primacy and authority over the new cult with the sovereigns of Kongo seeking to monopolize the propagation of Catholicism and control the access to missionary teachings. This also meant sending Kongolese agents to Portugal to obtain formal religious training, because only an African clergy, independent of Portuguese intermediation, would guarantee direct access to the new symbols and rites of Christianity.⁴⁸ As is well documented, Afonso established schools

⁴⁴ Thornton 1984, p. 155.

⁴⁵ Miller 1997a, p. 257.

⁴⁶ Hilton 1985, pp. 60-65.

⁴⁷ Young 2007, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Reginaldo 2005, pp. 17-19. It is important to note that the missionaries complied with the Kongo elite. Raminelli 2001, p. 246, has shown that in some highly hierarchical societies, such as the kingdom of Kongo, conversion proceeded from the top of the hierarchy to the bottom, with the elite being baptized before their subjects. This contrasts, for example, with the conversion process in the Finnish Lutheran missions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Ovamboland, where, although the Finns sought to convert kings first, the initial converts came from the bottom of the social hierarchy. See Miettinen 2005 and Weiss 2000.

in São Salvador to instruct the nobility's children in basic literacy and to train them in the Christian faith.⁴⁹ These actions facilitated and strengthened the processes of central government.

In the sixteenth century, the local educational system established by Afonso sent students to be ordained as priests and to serve as diplomatic representatives of the kingdom. Diplomats were needed especially as King Alvaro I sought to liberate Kongo from the restrictions of Portuguese patronal claims, particularly as exercised by the Portuguese bishop in São Tomé. Alvaro's goal was to have greater control over the nature and development of Christianity in Kongo. However, this was not realized until the reign of Alvaro II, who succeeded his father in 1587. In 1596, the papacy agreed to create a new diocese in Kongo and a bishop was nominated for São Salvador.⁵⁰ Due to the political struggles between the Portuguese and Kongo, Portugal tried to exercise formal control over the bishop of Kongo in the early seventeenth century. Not succeeding, the bishop was moved from São Salvador to Luanda in 1624 and stopped from ordaining new Kongo clergy.⁵¹

When the priesthood was closed to the Kongoleses, the kings of Kongo sought to obtain regular clergy directly from Rome. Despite Portuguese opposition, negotiations succeeded, and in 1645 the first Italian Capuchins arrived in Kongo. Educated Kongo elite formed a group of lay assistants to the missionaries and served as interpreters, 'masters' of churches or chapels, and catechists. In fact, European priests did little more than perform the sacraments. According to Thornton, lay Christians played an important role in the development of Catholicism in Kongo and were almost solely responsible for the creation of the unusual interpretation of Christianity. They also propagated Christianity actively. Going from village to village, they taught rural people Christian prayers and hymns, prepared the way for priests and instructed people. According to Thornton, they ensured continuity in the Church and preserved its doctrine.⁵²

Although there was considerable syncretism in Christian practice in Kongo, Thornton has argued that the European clergy who visited Kongo accepted it as orthodox. Capuchin missionaries were in Kongo to improve the habits of a Christian community, not to convert pagan people to the Faith. They denounced some customs and habits of the Kongoleses as sinful or superstitious, but they did not label these as pagan, which was an important distinction. At times there was considerable criticism of the 'anti-Christian' behavior of certain Kongo rulers, but this was usually voiced by people who had political rather

⁴⁹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Gray 1999, pp. 144-146.

⁵¹ Thornton 1984, pp. 163-164.

⁵² Thornton 1984, pp. 164-165.

than religious motives to belittle kings' devotion to the Christian lifestyle. For example, missionary documents paint Diogo I (ruled 1545-61) as a bad Christian who persecuted clergy and maintained pagan customs, but these reports have to be put into the context of the unsuccessful Jesuit mission to Kongo between 1548 and 1555. According to Thornton, there is strong evidence of various kings' unswerving formal loyalty to Christianity. This was manifested in their letters to the Pope, in the requests for missionaries and marital dispensations, and even in their pleading for Divine assistance against locust invasions.⁵³

5.2.2 The Shaping of Religious Identities

As the Catholic religion became central to the political ideology of the kingdom, it was first and foremost appropriated by the urban elite. Young has argued that, until the mid-seventeenth century, Christianity was closely associated with the royal court and provincial nobility.⁵⁴ Whether Catholicism in Kongo was also accepted by the masses is a question that has been disputed by some scholars. This question has to be approached with caution, bearing in mind the geographical specificities of the kingdom. The fundamental division in Kongo society was that between the *mbanza* or towns and the *libata* or villages of the rural countryside.⁵⁵ The villages can be seen as being on the periphery rarely visited by missionaries, and hence with less devotion to the Christian lifestyle of the urban elite. Although Capuchin missionaries established churches and schools in the rural sector, Young has argued that these institutions had little effect on the local populations.⁵⁶

Among the scholars who have argued that Kongo society accepted only a thin veneer of Christianity is Balandier, who has argued that "Christianity affected only a slim minority. For the majority of the people of Kongo, its ceremonies, its symbolism, its churches, and its clergy were less pretexts for belief than occasions for imitation."⁵⁷ Balandier's generalized notion was elaborated upon by Hilton, who sought to distinguish the Christianity of the nobles from that of the subjects. Although people of the countryside demanded baptism from the Christian priests, they interpreted this first and foremost as protection against witchcraft. In this way, missionaries also established a degree of ideological dominance for the king, so that baptism was seen as the king's rite of protection against witchcraft. However, according to Hilton, baptism did

⁵³ Thornton 1984, pp. 148-151.

⁵⁴ Young 2007, p. 50.

⁵⁵ Thornton 1983, p. 15.

⁵⁶ Young 2007, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Balandier 1968, p. 254.

not signify that people would have adopted a Christian lifestyle.⁵⁸ Reginaldo has similarly argued that, for the majority of the people, baptism did not have a profound meaning. The acceptance of Catholicism did not mean that old beliefs and customs would have been abandoned automatically. Throughout centuries, the question of polygamy and the practice of traditional cults were constant sources of conflict between the missionaries and Africans.⁵⁹

Heywood and Thornton have presented Kongo's Catholicism from a different perspective. They have argued that, by the end of the sixteenth century, people followed regular Christian ways in the capital of São Salvador, attending Mass routinely, and usually knowing the principal elements of the faith. This level of religious life could also be found in other towns. In the villages people did not receive regular church services, but they still shared in this religious culture by recognizing and accepting the principal rituals and symbols of Christianity. Catholic objects, such as the cross and religious images, were a part of their religious lives. They asked for baptism and sought to have their own children baptized when priests visited their villages. Even in the absence of ordained priests, lay preachers, whom the people called teachers, were found in many villages.⁶⁰

Heywood and Thornton have designated Catholicism in Kongo an "Atlantic Creole form of Christianity". This signified that, in practice, the Kongolese retained many of their older beliefs despite their formal conversion to Catholicism through baptism. For example, polygamy was favored in contrast to the Christian sacrament of marriage. Local deities continued to be revered in their traditional locations by most people, but these were increasingly identified as Catholic saints or as angels. Traditional religious specialists continued to produce charms and their products were still accepted as valid throughout the area, although missionaries, and sometimes the Kongolese educated elite, condemned this as "fetishism" and sought to end it. According to Heywood and Thornton, the traditional practices were not eradicated and "many local customs connected to older religious beliefs remained."⁶¹

The relationship between the old and the new religion was not always harmonious, and there were conflicts between the representatives of the two. Young has argued that Kongo nobility actively opposed the practice of indigenous religion well into the seventeenth century, and the arrival of Christianity was often regarded in the villages as an intrusion upon local religious practice. There were often clashes between Catholic missionaries and adherents to traditional religious practices. During their proselytizing campaigns, missionaries burned

⁵⁸ Hilton 1985, pp. 100-102.

⁵⁹ Reginaldo 2005, pp. 19-21.

⁶⁰ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 65-66.

⁶¹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 66-67.

“idols” as they attempted to remove all traces of the Devil from Kongo. According to Young, the burning of idols was also important for the Kongo court, because it sought to remove the potential for spiritual and religious competition from outlying areas. Villagers often rebelled against the intrusions of missionaries because they regarded them as ritual experts, sanctioned by the king and the ruling elite, which represented a real threat against rural religious leaders.⁶²

Christianity was accepted in Kongo even outside the court. Villagers, despite their occasional disagreements and clashes with the missionaries, embraced Catholic identity at least formally through baptism. On the question of identity, however, Sweet has argued that labeling the Kongolese primarily as Christian strips them of their spiritual core. Sweet does not argue that there were no Kongolese Christians, but questions the extent to which Christian identity trumped other religious identities among them. He suggests that Christianity and indigenous Kongolese religion operated side by side, with the broad Central African cosmology remaining the dominant religious paradigm for most Kongolese in the process of conversion to Christianity.⁶³

There were many differing assessments of Kongo’s Christian identity during the seventeenth century. Kongo was widely acknowledged as a Christian country by local Portuguese officials and the Dutch and English traders who began to trade for slaves on the coast. One Dutch visitor who lived in the country between 1638 and 1642 noted that Christianity was visible even in remote rural areas. People all over the country saluted devoutly wooden crosses and knelt down before them. They also wore rosaries and said Catholic prayers. Even in Wandu, an eastern province visited by the Dutch in 1643, all reportedly held themselves as Christians. Some missionaries and church officials were more critical. Jesuit missionaries, who reestablished their mission field in Kongo in the 1620s, opined that the faith flourished there almost universally. The Jesuit Mateus Cardozo was, however, unhappy with the state of Christian knowledge in the kingdom, saying that only the most advanced knew Our Father and the Creed in Latin. He also reported that in the eastern provinces of Kongo, there were non-Christians or people with very little knowledge of Christian doctrine. His solution was to distribute the newly published Kikongo catechism as widely as possible. Capuchins were intent on rooting out traditional religious practices in Kongo. They targeted especially their rival “priests”, the *ngangas*, who conducted public cults and rituals, divination, augury, and healing. Capuchins believed that Christian practice could be purified by eliminating the indigenous religious specialists.⁶⁴

⁶² Young 2007, pp. 51-52.

⁶³ Sweet 2003, pp. 112-113.

⁶⁴ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 171-178.

In some areas, however, the Capuchins were impressed by people's commitment to Catholicism. Gray has argued that this was most evident in Soyo, where the Capuchins were able to establish and maintain a continuous presence in the second half of the seventeenth century. Their influence was especially felt in the court, where Christian rituals and symbols provided an important component. According to Gray, missionaries succeeded in imposing the sacrament of marriage on Soyo's elite. They also gave themselves wholeheartedly to the eradication of competing *nganga*. However, even in Soyo, when asked whether they wanted to "observe the laws of God or their superstitious ceremonies", a general assembly of the people replied that "they firmly believed in God and in everything that was taught them, but that they also believed in their ceremonies and vain observances".⁶⁵

5.2.3 Religious Reinterpretations

European visitors were often impressed that most Kongoleses reported themselves to be Christian. However, at the same time missionaries complained that the Kongoleses saw no essential distinction between the practices of their old religion and Christianity. They shaped the religion to their own culture, being both enthusiastic borrowers and diligent transformers of European culture. For example, in their reinterpretation of the creation story, they made God create Kongo ahead of all other countries.⁶⁶ One way in which seventeenth-century Kongo kings sought to promote Catholicism was by establishing Christian institutions and organizations. The *Ordem de Cristo* (Order of Christ) was founded in 1607 and the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia* (Holy House of Mercy) in 1617.⁶⁷ Lay religious brotherhoods dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary (*Nossa Senhora do Rosário*) were also founded in Kongo by 1610. The elite of São Salvador held the most important posts in these lay organizations.⁶⁸ The brotherhoods in Kongo were dedicated to various spiritual exercises and celebrated Mass for their members and benefactors. The most important function was to pay respect to the souls of the dead by celebrating a Mass for them.⁶⁹

Among the religious transformations that occurred with the arrival of Christianity in Kongo were the burial rites. As far back as the early sixteenth

⁶⁵ Gray 1990, pp. 39-49.

⁶⁶ Thornton 2007, p. 97.

⁶⁷ The Order of Christ became a central part of Kongo's military life, its symbol worn by the king and the nobles on their garments. The Holy House of Mercy was a brotherhood devoted to caring for the sick and poor. Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 173; Brásio 1959.

⁶⁸ Kiddy 2005, p. 32.

⁶⁹ Hilton 1985, p. 97.

century, rulers associated the new faith with the cult of the royal graves, for which there was a strong precedent amongst local chiefs. According to Hilton, Christian priests supported the cult of the royal and elite graves. Whereas traditional practice insisted on burying bodies in the woods near settlements, Christian practice was to bury the dead, especially the leaders and their relatives, in or next to the churches. Hilton has shown that the Kongo ruler led the residents of São Salvador in all the major celebrations devoted to the dead. On All Souls Day, a great procession visited the churches, placed lighted candles on the tombs, and attended Mass in a celebration that lasted all night long. On Holy Thursday, a similar procession went to pray at the tombs.⁷⁰ Thus, Christianity did not necessarily diminish the significance of funerals or the importance of respecting ancestors, but it added another ritual dimension to the practice.

The development of Christianity in Kongo required that the theological vocabulary be translated into Kikongo. This already took place early in the sixteenth century during the reign of Afonso. According to Heywood and Thornton, the Kikongo term *nkisi*, which referred to physical receptacles in which spirits or deities manifested themselves, and which the Portuguese often called “idols”, was used for an important linguistic transformation. An abstract form *ukisi* was designated to mean “holy” in Portuguese and Latin. The Holy Bible was translated as a “book with the characteristics of idols” (*nkanda a ukisi*) and a Christian priest as “a religious specialist with the characteristics of idols” (*nganga a ukisi*). *Moyo*, signifying ancestors’ souls, was the translation for saints, and the Holy Spirit was called *Moyo Ukisi*. The Holy Trinity was rendered as three people (*antu a tatu*), focusing on their ancestral nature.⁷¹

Not all scholars have been convinced by the functionality of these translations. MacGaffey has evaluated the interaction between the Kongolese and Europeans as a “dialogue of the deaf”. For centuries, this was reflected on both sides by the ambiguous vocabulary that mediated the dialogue, in which religious terms carried a range of meanings, with pagan terms known obscurely or not at all to the missionaries and Christian terms waveringly by the Kongolese.⁷² MacGaffey has argued that the missionaries did not speak Kikongo sufficiently and preached and heard confessions through interpreters which caused distortions in the communication between them and the Kongolese. According to MacGaffey, the missionaries’ “understanding of local culture was condescending, superficial, and superstitious”.⁷³ While MacGaffey’s argument might have been true in some cases, in other cases it does not hold so well. For

⁷⁰ Hilton 1985, pp. 62, 94-96.

⁷¹ Thornton 2002, pp. 84-85; Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 63-64.

⁷² MacGaffey 1994, pp. 257-260.

⁷³ MacGaffey 1986, p. 203.

example, Cavazzi's work is an example of a missionary who took great pains to understand the societies and people with whom he came face to face.⁷⁴

Capuchin missionaries, however, also made concessions to the Kongo version of Christianity. One of the most important concessions was accepting that there were differences in how the two traditions related to recently deceased ancestors. According to Thornton, a cornerstone of Kongo theology was that ancestors were active participants in the world of the living, whereas in Christianity the dead were permanently removed to Heaven, Purgatory or Hell. Missionaries accepted that the most important Christian holidays commemorating the dead, the Feast of All Souls and All Souls Eve, were both days devoted to the dead but also to the ancestors. The ceremony of All Souls Eve in São Salvador included an all-night vigil, performed at the graves of the ancestors of particular families, followed in the morning by Mass. Missionaries had to acknowledge and tolerate the fact that the Kongo continued to follow the older practices with regard to their ancestors.⁷⁵

There were also other reinterpretations in the Kongo version of Catholicism. According to Hilton, the Kongo believed that Christ had been a powerful chief, thus associating Christianity with the cult of the graves of chief predecessors. The Christian concepts of heaven and hell were hardly accepted by any but the most devout Kongo Christians. But most importantly, Catholic priests were regarded as *nganga* who used *nkisi* or charms to influence events in the world of man. Each new missionary group was greeted with great enthusiasm because it offered the likelihood of new and more powerful defenses against *kindoki* or witchcraft. Priests were believed to practice as well as protect against witchcraft, and to have destructive as well as protective and manipulative powers. When the Capuchins arrived in Kongo in the mid-seventeenth century, children and adults fell on their knees, kissed their hands, and asked for their blessing as protection against *kindoki*. But the great power attributed to the Capuchins also caused them to be feared, for they could use it to practice witchcraft themselves.⁷⁶

A reaction against the power of the missionaries was seen in the late 1650s and early 1660s, when *Kimpasi* societies proliferated in Kongo. *Kimpasi* was a kind of social remedy, a secret society that sought to help a community or a group of communities suffering from calamities and problems. The initiates experienced ritual death, from which they emerged with a new identity.⁷⁷ The indigenous religious revival consciously opposed Christianity, and the Kongo elite had to take drastic measures to prevent the *Kimpasi* from spreading. The

⁷⁴ Cavazzi 1965.

⁷⁵ Thornton 2002, p. 85.

⁷⁶ Hilton 1985, pp. 92-99, 160.

⁷⁷ See Hilton 1985, pp. 26-28; Thornton 1998b, pp. 56-58.

seizure of *nkisi* and severe penalties were ordered for *Kimpasi* initiates, and the Capuchins burned innumerable *nkisi* and *Kimpasi* enclosures. After the persecution, many former *Kimpasi* initiates affirmed the Christian faith.⁷⁸

Indigenous interpretations of Christian doctrine in Kongo were not marginal events, but even gained millenarian features. One of these challengers to Catholic priests was the 20-year-old Kongolesse woman Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita, who in August 1704 claimed that she had been permanently possessed by Saint Anthony. As Thornton has explained in his detailed study of the Antonian movement, Dona Beatriz was not the first prophet to emerge in the kingdom torn by civil war and succession disputes in the early eighteenth century, but she was preceded by at least three other prophets. Her immediate predecessor was a woman named Apollonia Mafuta, who in late 1703 or early 1704 denounced various people as witches, and claimed that all charms, including crosses and religious medals, were polluted with negative *kindoki* and could be used for witchcraft. Although Mafuta's movement relied on Kongolesse concepts of *kindoki* and not the priests' views on witchcraft, Thornton has called the movement profoundly Christian, in fact, representing a purification of Christianity in Kongo.⁷⁹

Dona Beatriz made her appearance as Saint Anthony in August 1704 and replaced Mafuta as the center of the movement. Before her possession by Saint Anthony, Dona Beatriz had been initiated into the *Kimpasi* society, which had not vanished despite the persecutions some decades earlier.⁸⁰ The kingdom of Kongo had been ravaged by civil wars since the defeat by the Portuguese in the battle of Mbwila in 1665, but Dona Beatriz gained a widespread following in Kongo and proclaimed Kongolesse unity by asserting that she could restore the kingdom. She sought to do this by waging a war against all forms of greed and jealousy and its most obvious manifestation, misuse of *kindoki*. In her teachings, Dona Beatriz concentrated on several issues. She argued that Jesus had been born in Kongo's royal capital, São Salvador; she charged the Catholic priests with intentionally ignoring black saints, but her arrival now meant that the Kongolesse could have saints of their own; and, in her rewording of the prayer *Salve Regina* to *Salve Antoniana*, she denied the power of the sacraments as mere symbols and stressed that the intention of the believer was more important than the performance of sacraments.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hilton 1985, p. 196.

⁷⁹ Thornton 1998b, pp. 107-109.

⁸⁰ *Kimpasi* societies were regularly met by the Capuchin missionary Luca da Caltanisetta during his travels in Kongo in the 1690s. Caltanisetta 1970, pp. 39, 71, 152-156.

⁸¹ Thornton 1998b, pp. 110-116. Intention was critical to determining whether the use of *kindoki* was positive or negative. Such beliefs had also prevailed in the heretical movements in Europe during the Middle Ages. Cf. Le Roy Ladurie 1984, p. 318.

Dona Beatriz travelled extensively as Saint Anthony and claimed that she could heal the sick, a miracle that only strengthened her claims. She announced that she could heal the infertile and found an immediate following among Kongolesse women. Although she found numerous followers among the common people, who accompanied her as she moved around, she could not convince the nobility of Kongo of her vision of restoring the country. Commoners and peasants sang the *Salve Antoniana* and proclaimed openly the tenets of her preaching. The movement proceeded like a pilgrimage to the holy city of São Salvador, where they arrived in late October or early November 1704, thus symbolically restoring the kingdom of Kongo. In order to further her goals, she commissioned her own missionaries from among her followers, calling them “Little Anthonys” and sending them often in pairs to preach throughout the kingdom. They told people that baptism served no purpose in God’s eyes and distributed little cast-metal statues of Saint Anthony that were intended to replace the cross and other symbols of Christian worship.⁸²

The official church scorned the movement but was unable to stop it. However, Dona Beatriz’s position was undermined by her pregnancy in mid-1705. She had formed a close relationship with a man named João Barro, and twice had recourse to abortive medicine, but on the third occasion it failed to work. To hide the pregnancy from her followers, she abandoned São Salvador in February or March 1706, and gave birth to her child in the fields of a nearby village. She was captured soon afterwards and delivered to the hands of King Pedro IV, whose council condemned her to death by burning. However, the movement still continued in the countryside for some time after Dona Beatriz’s death, and the common people still manifested Antonian sentiments against the priests, who were accused of practicing *kindoki* for evil purposes.⁸³ It seems that belief in Saint Anthony remained constant in Kongo for many years to come. In the middle of the eighteenth century it was still common that people carried statues of the saint carved out of wood around their necks. At the same time, black soldiers who fought for the Portuguese attributed all their victories to the same saint.⁸⁴

5.2.4 Eighteenth-Century Development

The kingdom of Kongo emerged from the civil wars under Pedro IV between 1709 and 1715. Pedro IV was committed not only to uniting the kingdom by

⁸² Thornton 1998b, pp. 132-149.

⁸³ Thornton 1998b, pp. 166-194.

⁸⁴ AHU, Angola Cx. 37, doc. 50, Ofício do Governador e Capitão General do Reino de Angola (Marques de Lavradio) ao Conselho Ultramarino, 19 August 1750. In this correspondence it is claimed that the Kongolesse called Saint Anthony the “God Saint Anthony”.

occupying São Salvador, but also to staying loyal to the Catholic tradition of the monarchy and to the guidance of Italian missionaries. According to Hastings, he was characterized as a “true and zealous Catholic, devoted to divine worship, the cult of the saints and respect for the Holy Father”.⁸⁵ Kongo’s political structure had two basic elements, which were the kingdom and the autonomous constituents. The king himself did not possess great economic or political powers. Susan Broadhead has argued that the only power resource open to development was the sacred, royal Christian cult. However, during the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century there were many years when Kongo was without the services of European Catholic clergy. According to Broadhead, Catholic rituals never entirely disappeared, especially at court. When missionaries were present, they held a high position in the king’s council and were essential for the installation of a new king. The sacred resources clearly had a political dimension, as the Christian cult was crucial for the maintenance of the kingdom. Thus, Christian practice in eighteenth-century Kongo had two distinct manifestations – one among the nobility and another among the commoners. For the commoners, Christian practice consisted mainly of receiving baptism, but it did not include much instruction about the faith. In some areas, further practices such as the veneration of popular relics or the singing of litanies and chants were kept up.⁸⁶

In the eighteenth century, the Kongolese continued viewing Catholicism through their distinct spiritual and cultural prisms. In some cases indigenous Kongo priests were denounced for failing to follow Catholic precepts. One of the priests accused of suspect practices was Father Miguel da Silva, who was denounced by a Capuchin missionary from Ambuila in 1718.⁸⁷ Da Silva was a Kongo and had been born in São Salvador.⁸⁸ He was accused of baptizing members of his congregation without the necessary ceremonies, in his own house and not in the church. Baptism was performed without Holy Water and without instruction about the tenets of faith. Instead, da Silva simply gave salt to those who wanted to be baptized.⁸⁹ Father da Silva also married couples who had lived in consensual union for several years without making them confess

⁸⁵ Hastings 1998.

⁸⁶ Broadhead 1979, pp. 619-620, 625, 632-633.

⁸⁷ Da Silva was not the first and only Kongo priest to be denounced. The Dean of Angola, writing to Lisbon in 1665, described the behavior of two Kongo priests, who had lived for many years without meeting the prelate, and without being punished for their crimes: they were accused of idolatry, making sacrifices to idols like the unbaptized of the country, and they were publicly polygamous with many acknowledged children. Brasio 1952-, vol. XII, doc. 235, pp. 555-558.

⁸⁸ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 98, ff. 302v-303v. He died in Lemba before the case was ever brought to trial. *Ibid.*, f. 303v.

⁸⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 98, ff. 289, 294v, 301. Similar accusations had been presented in the late sixteenth century against Father Manuel da Silveira, who was denounced for negligence when administering the sacrament of baptism. See Horta 1997, p. 317.

their “illicit relationships” before performing the marriage ceremony.⁹⁰ He used to hear confessions in his house with the penitents on one side and himself on the other, conversing with a quantity of people at the same time. Because of the confusion at these large gatherings, da Silva only heard a few sins from each confessant, and without further examination, he absolved each person. Penance was performed in a group, confessants each taking turns with a large staff to publicly beat themselves, reciting their sins. The sins that people recited included, for example, the breaking of the sixth commandment so-and-so many times, curing illnesses with witchcraft, and eating meat on Fridays.⁹¹

It can be seen that Father da Silva administered the basic sacraments and, at least formally, his followers were Christians. Sweet, who has studied the case, has argued that da Silva naturalized the sacraments to fit Kongolese cultural understanding, and integrated the Catholic confession into a broader communal critique of individual transgressions.⁹² The denunciation can also be read as a sign of a cultural clash between a European priest, concerned with the upkeep of orthodoxy in Kongo’s Catholic Church, and the local community of believers, whose daily religious practice was less formal. However, the denunciation clearly shows that people in da Silva’s congregation had assumed a Catholic identity. The missionary did not claim that these people were heretics. Instead, he questioned Father da Silva’s commitment to formal Catholic orthodoxy.

One important point made in the denunciation was the use of salt in the administration of baptism. In the Catholic baptismal ritual, the priest placed a small amount of salt on the tongue, followed by holy water. For the Kongo, salt became the central aspect of the baptism. In Kikongo, the sacrament of baptism was called *yadia mungwa*, or the eating of salt. The Kongo generally believed that salt was a repellent of evil people and spirits, and for them salt was the essential active element in the rite. It was believed that Christian baptism or eating salt could ward off evil and protect people from witches.⁹³ In the mid-seventeenth century, when Capuchin missionaries recognized that baptism was seen in Kongo as a rite of protection from evil spirits, they attempted to break the association. However, only a few could be persuaded to accept the rite without salt.⁹⁴ This was also reflected in Father da Silva’s practice of administering baptism. Recognizing that his countrymen conceived of the salt and not the water as the crucial element of baptism, he chose to ignore the water completely.

⁹⁰ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 98, ff. 289-289v.

⁹¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 98, ff. 289v, 296v. For many people, confession was a means to healing since disease was often regarded as the result of rule breaking.

⁹² Sweet 2003, p. 193.

⁹³ Hilton 1985, p. 98.

⁹⁴ Young 2007, p. 53.

Sweet has argued that during the era of the slave trade, most Kongolese understood baptism simply as an external protection against the evil that plagued Africans, not as a prescription for eternal salvation and the washing away of sin. In Sweet's view, the rituals and practices of Christianity were seen by Central Africans as just one more form of powerful medicine.⁹⁵ Young has further questioned whether the Kongolese really converted to Catholicism if Christianity was merely adapted to their religious precepts, and if Kongolese Christians did not demonstrate any fundamental religious change. According to Young, the role, extent, and depth of Christianity in Kongo should not be overstated, because traditional African religious expression continued to play a central role in the lives and belief systems of the Kongolese. A major problem in interpreting the depth of Christian conversion in Kongo is that scholars have to rely almost solely on European missionary reports, where the degree of Christian conversion might have been exaggerated and the persistent "transgressions" of the Kongolese overlooked.⁹⁶

Missionary reports from the second half of the eighteenth century generally continue to depict Kongo as a Christian country, despite the decadence of the kingdom and shortage of missionaries. These reports, far from overlooking Kongolese transgressions, acknowledge that there were shortcomings in the behavior of some Kongo Christians and that Catholicism did not prevail uniformly throughout Kongo's vast provinces. Father Rosario dal Parco, the prefect of Capuchin missions in Angola and Congo, reported in his comprehensive letter to Rome in 1760 that the king of Kongo and the majority of people in his court, as well as rulers of the provinces, were married ecclesiastically, but all the others lived in concubinage which did not please the prefect. Lay assistants or "masters" fluent in Portuguese were responsible for teaching the catechism to the people. They also assisted the priests when they heard confessions, even if the priests spoke Kikongo. According to Parco, this was problematic because "masters" could delude the missionaries and mistranslate the confessions.⁹⁷

Parco's report shows that the king and the provincial rulers loyal to him were committed to Catholicism. Even in places where missions had been abandoned since the 1740s, such as Soyo and Bamba, rulers sent letters to Luanda requesting missionaries to come to administer the sacraments of baptism, marriage, and confession. At the same time, however, Parco acknowledged that the Kongolese still had many vices. They were superstitious, believing in omens such as dreams and birdsongs. Many people adored their traditional deities and gave credit to poison ordeals. Along with polygamy, Parco also condemned the

⁹⁵ Sweet 2003, pp. 195-196.

⁹⁶ Young 2007, pp. 58-59.

⁹⁷ Parco 1963, p. 371.

prevalent practice of selling baptized Catholics to the English traders, whom he considered heretics.⁹⁸

In 1775, Father Cherubino da Savona mapped Kongo's mission field in detail, making it clear that there were regional variations within Kongo with respect to the degree of Catholic influence. Besides São Salvador, Savona listed three "kingdoms" (Nkundu, Lemba and Wandu) and 22 provinces, and gave a brief description of the state of Christianity in each. In the majority, people were Catholics, although prone to superstition and with a reliance on traditional deities. Besides being baptized, people demonstrated their faith by marching in religious processions during saints' days (as in Soyo) or by convening on Saturdays and feast days in the church to recite the catechism and rosary (as in Mbamba and Kiova). In two provinces, however, people were clearly resistant to Catholic teachings and missionary influence. In the province of Quina people were not inclined to receive baptism and Savona characterized them as "full of superstitions and idolatry". In Ambuila, *Kimpasi* prevailed and people practiced male circumcision and a female initiation rite known as *Uyo*.⁹⁹

The missionary field of Kongo was dominated by Italian Capuchins for the best part of the eighteenth century, but in the late 1770s Portugal sent 20 missionaries to West Central Africa. Four of them were destined for Kongo, but one of them died on the march to the interior. Among the missionaries headed to Kongo was the secular priest André de Couto Godinho, who had a Bachelor's degree in Canon Law from the University of Coimbra. Unlike his traveling companions, Father Godinho was black. His origins are unknown but, remarkably, he had declared "a burning desire" to go to Kongo.¹⁰⁰ In a way, Father Godinho was going back to work among his own. Unless he had more personal motives, such as Kongolese ancestry, his desire can only have been motivated by Kongo's reputation as a Christian country.

Although the presence of missionaries in Kongo had been minimal throughout the eighteenth century, one of the three Portuguese priests working there alongside Father Godinho, Rafael de Castelo de Vide, described the country and its people as Christian. Vide noted that on their way to São Salvador, as soon as they entered the Kongolese territory in the marquisate of Muzul, people came forward asking to be baptized. In the *banza* of Itaíbe in the same marquisate, people gathered together to sing the *Terço* of Mary in Kikongo and "litanies as is their custom". Vide observed that people showed devotion to Mary, Saint Francis, and Saint Anthony. The Portuguese missionaries distributed Catholic objects, such as rosaries and *veronicas*, to the village leaders. According to

⁹⁸ Parco 1963, pp. 371-376.

⁹⁹ Savona 1963, pp. 376-389.

¹⁰⁰ AHU, Angola Cx. 62 (cont.)/63, doc. 97, *Relação dos Ecclesiasticos, que paixão ao Reino de Angola por missionarios, no anno de 1779*, undated document.

Vide, the people had a “vanity” of being Christians. They carried big crosses and crucifixes around their necks and brought their children to be baptized. However, despite this overt demonstration of formal Catholicism, Vide remarked that, due to the lack of priests, the people were “not very Christian” because of their superstitions which were “natural for them”.¹⁰¹

The Portuguese priests resided in São Salvador but made missions to the outlying regions as well. In the villages they visited, people either came themselves or brought their children to be baptized. As in earlier times, other sacraments were not as popular as baptism. Vide’s account also emphasizes that the practice of educating lay assistants had survived in Kongo throughout the eighteenth century. In many villages, the priests were welcomed by individuals who spoke and sometimes even wrote Portuguese. These *Mestres da Igreja* or Masters of the Church, as they were called, acted as interpreters. The importance that people gave to honoring their ancestors had not diminished. Missionaries were called to officiate at celebrations for the souls of the dead. Vide noted that Saturday was especially important for Kongolese Christians, who used to gather on Saturday mornings in churches to recite their rosaries.¹⁰²

In the 1780s, the Catholic religion was still observed most vigorously in the environs of São Salvador. During his missions further afield, Vide encountered numerous people who carried traditional talismans around their necks or wore clothing adorned with “diabolic” symbols. When he tore these away, stamped on or burned them, people defended themselves by saying that they relied on their traditional ways because there were no priests to teach them. The missionary had to admit that they were right. During his eight-year stay in Kongo, Vide also encountered *Kimpasi* houses, which had never disappeared despite missionary efforts in the seventeenth century. According to Vide, *Kimpasi* houses were places where many people, enticed by “*feiticeiros*” or sorcerers, went to seek cures for illness and other things. Spirit possession, which undoubtedly was one of the greatest worries for the missionary, often took place in *Kimpasi* houses.¹⁰³

Kongolese Catholicism was most negatively described by the Capuchin Father Raimundo de Dicomano, who stayed in Kongo for three years between 1793 and 1795. According to him, there were only vestiges of Christianity left

¹⁰¹ Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, Série Vermelha de Manuscritos, 396, *Viagem do Congolo, do Missionário Frei Rafael de Castello de Vide Hoje Bispo de S. Thomé*, pp. 29-34. On Portuguese missionaries in Kongo in the 1780s, see also AHU, Angola Cx. 73, doc. 28, Fr. Alexandre Bispo de Malaca, 20-24 June 1788.

¹⁰² Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, Série Vermelha de Manuscritos, 396, *Viagem do Congolo, do Missionário Frei Rafael de Castello de Vide Hoje Bispo de S. Thomé*, pp. 67-73, 111, 125. Hilton 1985, p. 95, has noted that Saturday was adopted in Kongo as the day of the dead in the seventeenth century.

¹⁰³ Academia das Ciências de Lisboa, Série Vermelha de Manuscritos, 396, *Viagem do Congolo, do Missionário Frei Rafael de Castello de Vide Hoje Bispo de S. Thomé*, pp. 185-186, 190-191.

in the kingdom. People still claimed a Catholic identity and wanted to “eat salt”, but did not want to learn the doctrines taught by the missionary. After being baptized, they celebrated and then simply disappeared and did not return to the priest. Other sacraments were generally not valued by the Kongolese. Only a few nobles requested the Eucharist and were married ecclesiastically. For penitence, people thought that it was enough to appear before the priest, talk with the interpreter, and receive the priest’s blessing. Dicomano also reported that people did not go to church except in São Salvador, where they sang the litanies of Mary. He thought that a miracle was needed to put people “on the good path”. Despite his antipathies, Dicomano baptized as many people as he could, motivated partly by his need to sustain himself, because people who were baptized usually brought foodstuff to the priest.¹⁰⁴

In the 1790s, people still attached great value to baptism as a formal requirement to becoming a Christian but, in Dicomano’s view, this was not enough because other sacraments were not observed in the kingdom. There was thus a great discrepancy in how the Kongolese viewed Catholicism and how it was interpreted by the priest. After Dicomano’s exit from Kongo, the missionary field was practically abandoned for almost two decades until 1814.¹⁰⁵ Kongolese rulers made it clear that they did not want Portuguese missionaries to enter their dominions, because these were seen as promoters of Portuguese rule. Instead, Italian Capuchins were wanted and welcomed.¹⁰⁶

The observation of the people in Soyo in the late seventeenth century that they believed both in the tenets of the new religion as well as in their indigenous beliefs formed the core of the religious identity of most Kongolese even in the eighteenth century. They were formally Catholics and often very proud of the fact that they were baptized. According to most missionaries, they also took part in the other sacraments, perhaps excepting marriage, whenever this was possible. Although some scholars, such as Sweet and Young, have questioned the authenticity of Kongo’s conversion, the contemporary European observers characterized Kongo as a Catholic kingdom. The people of Kongo were also very proud of their Catholic heritage and identified themselves as Christian. There were clearly regional variations in how deeply this identity was assumed by individual Kongolese. It must also be emphasized that people did not put their faith solely on Catholic priests, but continued to rely on their traditional religious specialists because these could often offer practical remedies to illness and misfortune.

¹⁰⁴ Brasio 1987.

¹⁰⁵ Kabwita 2004, p. 268.

¹⁰⁶ *Relatorio do Governo de D. Miguel Antonio de Mello*, p. 558.

5.3 Christianity and Indigenous Beliefs in Portuguese Angola

5.3.1 Conversion in Angola to 1700

In other parts of West Central Africa, Christianity did not take root as easily as in the kingdom of Kongo. While Catholic missionaries had gained a steady foothold in Kongo in the early sixteenth century, the spiritual “conquest” of Angola was still dragging on in the eighteenth century. Instead of facing a single, large sized and centralized kingdom, whose ruler openly embraced Christianity, missionaries in Angola encountered smaller polities. Even when baptism was successful, missionaries claimed that people clung to their traditional religious practices and were unwilling to become full members of the Christian fold.¹⁰⁷ Although Christianity did not penetrate as deeply elsewhere in West Central Africa as in Kongo, it was influential nevertheless.¹⁰⁸

Early in the seventeenth century, the Portuguese were still desperate to bring the Mbundu of Angola under peaceful domination. Until 1607, not a single Mbundu chief paid tribute of any kind to Portuguese individuals or the Crown. Portuguese policy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries alternated between war and commerce. In 1571, Paulo Dias de Novais was given a charter to subjugate and conquer the kingdom of Ndongo, which he began by establishing Luanda in 1575. Fighting ensued between the Portuguese and the kingdom of Ndongo in 1580 and lasted a decade until a major Portuguese defeat against Ndongo and Matamba forces occurred in 1590. After this, the Portuguese began to make political alliances with various factions in Ndongo. They acquired captives through their own direct military activity, but also purchased them from local Africans who controlled the slave trade in the interior.¹⁰⁹

The Portuguese had initiated their missionary efforts in the kingdom of Ndongo even before the colonial conquest of Angola began. In 1520, a Portuguese delegation had been sent to visit and convert the ruler or *Ngola* of Ndongo, which did not yield any results. The second official attempt to contact the *Ngola* was made in the late 1550s to early 1560s, when an expedition including two Jesuit priests and two lay brothers went to negotiate with the reigning *Ngola*.¹¹⁰ According to Heywood and Thornton, the missionaries were partially prisoners but also gained a substantial following during their 15 years of teaching. Jesuits arriving in 1575 with Dias de Novais continued to extend

¹⁰⁷ Noted, for example, by Governor Rodrigo Cezar de Meneses in 1735. AHU, Angola Cx. 28, doc. 3, Oficio de Governador de Angola, 5 March 1735.

¹⁰⁸ Thornton 2007, p. 98.

¹⁰⁹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 82-98.

¹¹⁰ Birmingham 1966, pp. 88-89.

Christianity in the region.¹¹¹

Local religious mixture was evident in Angola from the beginning. Heywood and Thornton have shown that Jesuits were not convinced of the Christian identity of African converts, saying that they were “Christians in name only”. Jesuits were openly hostile to the Atlantic Creole form of Christianity, the spread of which they blamed on the secular priests. Jesuits established a college in Luanda in 1593 to teach interpreters in the hope that these would help them move Atlantic Creole Christianity closer to their ideal European model. They trained and sent “chapel boys” to the interior to teach and prepare the way for them, as they had done with the sons of nobles in Kongo. Jesuits, eager to rid Angola of unacceptable indigenous religious practices, sought to identify and burn shrines dedicated to local deities. In the process, they began another practice that was to become commonplace in Angola. When baptizing the *soba* of Songa in 1581, they replaced African “idols” and religious instruments with Christian religious objects. Soon after this, the Mbundu began to appropriate Christian objects and install them in their shrines as objects of devotion.¹¹²

The syncretistic practice of appropriating Catholic objects was noted by witnesses in inquisitorial inquiries led by the Jesuit Jorge Pereira in Luanda between 1596 and 1598. They reported that in Kongo and Ndongo, Africans bought crucifixes, images of saints, and even indulgences from New Christian merchants. One of these merchants had reportedly also sold “false relics” or masks and dolls that he had called “bones of saints” and “children of God”. The cultural exchange really worked both ways, because Portuguese merchants also obtained African objects of religious value.¹¹³ Heywood and Thornton have suggested that the Catholic Church spread in Angola not only in areas where regular priests traveled, but also outside of their jurisdiction, influenced by the secular clergy.¹¹⁴ One should also include Portuguese merchants as active agents in this process, because they were responsible for the adoption of Christian objects by Africans in many locations. As a result, as Heywood and Thornton have argued, “a new Mbundu version of Atlantic Creole Christianity was taking shape” in Angola. In this process, the Atlantic Creole model of integrating Central African religions and Christianity played a decisive role.¹¹⁵

Official Portuguese-Ndongo relations remained sour through the early seventeenth-century, as warfare rather than peaceful trade appeared more profitable for the governors of Luanda. In the early 1620s, Ndongo’s ruler *Ngola* Mbandi was eager to see peace and order restored in his land, and he sent his sister Nzinga to Luanda to negotiate with the newly arrived governor João Correia de

¹¹¹ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 98.

¹¹² Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 100-101.

¹¹³ Horta 1997, pp. 307-312.

¹¹⁴ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 105.

¹¹⁵ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 105.

Sousa. Nzinga became the most celebrated personality in seventeenth-century Angola until her death in 1663.¹¹⁶ While in Luanda, she was baptized by the name of Dona Ana de Souza and the governor acted as her godfather. Nzinga's meeting with Correia de Sousa came to nothing. Shortly after, *Ngola* Mbandi died and succession disputes ensued in Ndongo. These disputes broke into open warfare in 1626, as the Portuguese tried to oust Nzinga's faction from Ndongo.¹¹⁷

Nzinga had to flee from Ndongo in 1629, but she and her followers continued their resistance against the Portuguese. By 1635, she was able to cement her authority in Matamba, which became a major rival to Kasanje in supplying the slave trade. She managed to build a significant military force and challenge Portuguese claims for regional power. Despite her military successes, Nzinga also sought to restore peace through negotiations but these were interrupted by the Dutch invasion of Angola in 1641-1648. Negotiations recommenced in 1654, when Nzinga offered to open trade fairs on the border of Portuguese dominions and to help the Portuguese forces to conquer Kisama. The main provisions of the peace treaty that was signed in October 1656 concerned the establishment of a Capuchin mission in Matamba. Nzinga, in turn, promised to give up Imbangala customs used in her war camp, to reembrace Christianity, and to adopt a settled way of life.¹¹⁸

Capuchin missionaries arrived to Matamba at the time of peacemaking. Nzinga was ready to reconcile with the Church, and had requested priests and missionaries. A church was constructed and the missionaries proceeded to baptize the principal lords and some 8,000 people, including 1,000 children. Peace was celebrated in Europe as Nzinga's "second conversion", and the Propaganda Fide went on to publish a text entitled *La Meravigliosa conversione alla santa Fede di Christo delle Regina Singa*. Christianity expanded in Matamba as a result of missionary activity, and people took part in Catholic ceremonies and spiritual exercises.¹¹⁹

Although priests no doubt emphasized the religious aspects of Nzinga's return to Christianity, conversion in Central Africa also had political overtones. On the one hand, it could be argued that the process of converting the rulers was almost always linked to Portuguese attempts to boost their trading interests. Political allies were needed to expand the slave trade, and African allies were Christians at least in name. On the other hand, it is difficult to try to measure whether these conversions led to any change in the religious identity

¹¹⁶ On Nzinga's role in seventeenth-century Angolan history, see Miller 1975 and Thornton 1991.

¹¹⁷ Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 124-130.

¹¹⁸ Alencastro 2000, pp. 277-279; Birmingham 1966, pp. 89-116; Heywood and Thornton 2007a, pp. 132-135, 157. On the conditions of Nzinga's capitulation, see Brasio 1952-, vol. XII, doc. 24, pp. 57-60.

¹¹⁹ Gaeta 1668. On the "second baptism" of Nzinga, see also Brasio 1952-, vol. XII, doc. 45, pp. 117-118.

of the converts. One indication, although fragmentary, can be gleaned from a letter that Nzinga wrote to Pope Alexander VII and gives an indication of the extent to which she valued Catholicism. At least in her later years, Nzinga was full of humility, commending the honor of God. She stated that by August 1662, when the letter was dated, over 8,000 people had been baptized in her dominion. Over 700 marriages had been concluded as well. Finally, Nzinga asked the Pope to provide her with indulgences on Saint Anne's Day and on the Feast of Assumption on August 15.¹²⁰ According to Santos, Nzinga protected the missionaries in her dominion, concluded a Christian marriage, learned to read and write, and studied the catechism. Despite all this, after Nzinga's death her brother Francisco rebelled against Luanda and the mission fell into decadence.¹²¹

The number of baptisms during Nzinga's reign was rather impressive. Indeed, looking solely at the statistical record of missionary activities in West Central Africa, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the numbers, which indicate that people were eager to join the Christian flock. Capuchins were especially active in the late seventeenth century. Between 1672 and 1700, the Capuchins baptized around 340,000 people in Angola and Kongo. Marriages blessed by the church were less popular, amounting to around 50,000 during the same period.¹²² Contemporary observers were not blind to the fact that, for many Africans, baptism had only marginal meaning. The Jesuits wrote to the governor of Angola in 1678 stating that, on reflection, many of those who had been baptized were Christians in name only. Despite their conversion, they still seemed to be involved in their traditional rituals.¹²³

Missionaries sometimes used gifts to facilitate the process of conversion in the hinterland of Luanda. For example, imported wine was carried to the interior by a group of Capuchin missionaries attempting to convert the ruling elite of Matamba around 1650. Similarly, when the Portuguese attempted to baptize the ruler of Matamba in 1772, he was sent several containers of liquor as an inducement. However, the number of episodes during which missionaries provided alcohol to African rulers was limited.¹²⁴

As the slave trade escalated in the eighteenth century, captives with little or no contact with Atlantic Creole culture prior to their enslavement also arrived in Luanda. Before their embarkation for the Americas, these slaves went through a mass baptism in Luanda. As many as 700 slaves might be baptized in a matter of three or four hours in a church or the main plaza a day before departing Luanda. As Sweet has stated, the rite did not include catechization or any teaching whatsoever. Instead, the priests went from slave to slave, told

¹²⁰ Brasio 1952-, Vol. XII, doc. 161, pp. 402-403.

¹²¹ Santos 1969, p. 106.

¹²² Jadin 1961, pp. 437-438.

¹²³ Brasio 1952-, vol. XIII, doc. 192, pp. 455-464.

¹²⁴ Curto 2004, p. 183.

them their Christian name and wrote it on a paper for him or her; put salt in their mouths, and put water on their heads.¹²⁵ Therefore, slaves who left from Luanda had different degrees of familiarity with Atlantic Creole culture and religiosity. While some had been baptized and received Christian teaching before their enslavement, others clearly had no idea of what was expected of them as Catholics.

5.3.2 Impediments to the Spread of Catholicism

Despite the imposing record of baptism en masse, three themes that constantly arose in the correspondence dealing with religious matters in Angola were the deplorable state of the Church, the lack of missionaries, and the persistence of indigenous beliefs. The Portuguese generally required that local rulers who submitted to them accepted baptism and provided for the religious instruction of their subjects.¹²⁶ However, the number of missionaries was too small to be effective. Throughout the seventeenth century, there were plans to restart the seminary in Luanda. In 1648, this task was given to the Jesuits, with the intention of raising black youngsters into ecclesiastical life. The order was repeated in 1686, 1688 and 1691, but it was not executed as, according to Santos, the Jesuits showed more interest in local industry and agriculture. Their religious propagation campaigns were centered almost solely in Luanda while inland mission stations decayed.¹²⁷ The governor complained to the king in 1658 that the missionaries were completely uninterested in going to the interior.¹²⁸

In a letter dated in 1678, the Jesuits explained that they gave spiritual services to those who yearned for them in Luanda. In their own words, they taught the Christian doctrine on Sundays in the streets, especially to slaves; they also gave remissions to those who confessed their sins, and last rites to those on their deathbeds. They had two assistant clerics in Bengo, who gave instruction in the Catholic doctrine and administered confessions in the district. Each year a priest passed through Dande, Quilunda, Golungo and the Kwanza River, giving absolutions and baptizing children as well as adults. The Jesuits sought to educate local boys to serve as priests, because they were deemed more capable of hearing confessions given in the Kimbundu language.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Sweet 2003, pp. 196-197.

¹²⁶ Thornton 2007, p. 99.

¹²⁷ Santos 1969, p. 109. According to Hilton 1985, p. 139, the Luanda college concentrated increasingly on secular rather than missionary affairs in the seventeenth century. Besides engaging in the slave trade, the Jesuits owned extensive plantations which they worked with thousands of slaves.

¹²⁸ Brasio 1952-, vol. XII, doc. 72, pp. 179-180.

¹²⁹ Brasio 1952-, vol. XIII, doc. 192, pp. 455-464.

During the second half of the seventeenth century, the propagation of Catholicism in the interior of Angola was to a large extent left to the Capuchins. In 1659, the Carmelites arrived in Luanda and were the fourth religious order to establish themselves in Central Africa after the Jesuits, the Franciscans, and the Capuchins. Governor Gonçalo de Meneses reported in 1694 that the four religious orders all maintained their own convents in Luanda. Altogether there were 11 churches or chapels in Luanda and its immediate surroundings. Outside of Luanda, congregations were maintained in Massangano, Muxima, Cambambe, Ambaca, Pedras Negras, Icolo, Golungo, Talamatumbo and Dande. In Bengo, there were four churches or chapels. In the village of Massangano, there were two churches and, in the district of Massangano, five more chapels. Besides these, there was a church in Benguela, as well as one in Caconda. Furthermore, the different religious orders had their missions in different parts of the area. The governor noted that the number of priests was low with the daily running of the churches and the teaching of Christian doctrine in the hands of Africans. Although there were some white priests, at least in Massangano, Muxima, Cambambe, Ambaca, and Pedras Negras, the chaplains were natives. In Caconda, the chaplain was a mulatto.¹³⁰

The regional distribution of missionaries is noteworthy. While most priests were concentrated in Luanda and its hinterland, Benguela and its surroundings were left almost completely without preachers. The development of ecclesiastical life in Benguela occurred slowly. In 1674, Governor Francisco de Távora ordered the construction of a new church built of stone and chalk. The church was named Nossa Senhora do Pópulo, and according to Santos, in 1690 it was presided over by a single priest.¹³¹ In the mid-eighteenth century, the lack of missionaries was still noteworthy as some African rulers in Benguela's hinterland were requesting baptism and religious instruction. The authorities' wish for a Capuchin hospice to be constructed in Benguela was left unfulfilled.¹³²

The distribution of churches in Angola was outlined in a report by Bishop Luis da Anunciação Azevedo in 1778. According to this document, there were 64 churches and chapels in the *Reino de Angola* and the *Reino de Benguela*, but eight of them were in ruins, so 56 remained in existence. In Luanda, there were ten churches. The seven inland *presídios* of Angola had nine churches. Besides the *presídios*, Azevedo counted 19 settlements in the *sertão* of Angola, with a church in each, but only 13 of those remained standing.

¹³⁰ Santos, 1969, pp. 118-119. Cf. Brasio 1952-, vol. XIV, doc. 84, pp. 186-190. For detailed descriptions of churches in Luanda in the late seventeenth century, see Cadornega 1942, vol. III, pp. 12-27.

¹³¹ Santos 1969, p. 122.

¹³² AHU, Angola Cx. 36, doc. 7, Carta de Governador de Angola, 16 March 1748. On the lack of missionary involvement in Benguela and Caconda, see also AHU, Angola Cx. 53, doc. 71, Carta do Governador Geral, 18 October 1769.

The city of Benguela had a church and in the *sertão* of Benguela, the Bishop counted 12 settlements with a church in each. To these were added the churches in Cazanga, in the fort of São Miguel, and in Penedo. This was the theoretical extent of Catholic influence in Angola and Benguela, but in practice, most of these churches were left unattended because there were not enough qualified priests to work in them all. For example, of the seven churches in the different *presídios* of Angola, only three had a regular priest. In the *sertão* of Angola, seven out of 12 churches were manned.¹³³

The primary hindrance to missionary work in Angola was the lack of metropolitan funds. In 1693, King Dom Pedro II had proceeded to create an administrative board of the mission in Angola that included the governor, the bishop and two other administrators in Luanda. The task of the board was to distribute and pay the allowances to the congregations and missions in the interior. However, the board was dissolved 40 years later and it never played any significant role.¹³⁴ A governor's report from 1735 indicates that the mission field in Angola was still lacking a sufficient number of missionaries. Due to the shortage of missionaries the teaching people received was limited. Despite being baptized, people were not taught Christian doctrines but instead clung to their ancestral religious practices and beliefs. Even in areas where Catholicism had gained a foothold, within a few years people returned to their traditional religions, because the presence of priests was not consistent, the Governor concluded.¹³⁵ Roughly half a century later no significant improvements in missionary activities were detected.¹³⁶ Benguela, where two residing priests had more than enough to occupy them, was left without a single priest in the 1780s. At the same time there were 12 priests in Luanda, but even these struggled to fulfill their obligations during feasts such as Easter. Besides these problems, many of the church buildings deteriorated rapidly due to fragile building materials.¹³⁷

Another theme that rose constantly in correspondence was misconduct in clerical activities and the lack of apostolic zeal in eighteenth-century Angola. The general sentiment was that priests were more interested in their own material well-being, spending their days in idleness and frippery. They preferred the comforts of the city to the arduous conditions in the interior.¹³⁸ Clerical disobedience seems to have been quite widespread in Angola or, perhaps, some bishops were more judgmental than others. One bishop of Angola complained to

¹³³ AHU, Angola Cx. 61, doc. 75, Relações do Bispo de Angola, 11 June 1778.

¹³⁴ Santos 1969, pp. 112-118.

¹³⁵ AHU, Angola Cx. 28, doc. 3, Ofício de Governador de Angola, 5 March 1735. See also: AHU, Angola Cx. 28, doc. 9, Carta de Governador de Angola, 20 March 1735.

¹³⁶ AHU, Angola Cx. 62/63, doc. 45, Consultas da Mesa da Consciência e Ordens, 22 August 1780.

¹³⁷ AHU, Angola Cx. 73, doc. 28, Fr. Alexandre Bispo de Malaca, 20-24 June 1788.

¹³⁸ Santos 1969, p. 138.

the king that there was no prison for delinquent priests in Luanda and requested that one be established.¹³⁹ In his opinion, most of the priests were too ignorant, and allegedly could not even read, to hold office and should be suspended and replaced with more capable clergymen.¹⁴⁰ This was not accomplished and with the suppression of the Jesuit order in 1758, and their exit from Luanda in 1760, the problems of propagating the Catholic faith in Angola increased.

The popular notion was that many clerics came to seek fortunes and were only interested in furthering their own ends. One of these priests was Pedro Correa da Silva, who was eventually denounced to the Inquisition officials. In 1778, several witnesses were heard in Benguela. According to these testimonies, Pedro, who had preached first in Massangano and then in the Benguela hinterland, had various concubines. One of these was a *parda* named Joanna, with whom Pedro had a child in Benguela. After Joanna's death, he had sought the company of a black woman, named Joanna as well, and had another child with her. At the time of the denunciation, he was accompanied by a woman named Marcella. However, Pedro's adventures with women did not end there. He was said to bring both single and married women to his house on Sundays and Saints' Days after the Mass, and allegedly kept them there until the sunset. He also made approaches to women in the middle of their confessions. According to one of the witnesses, Pedro was punctual in saying Mass and in all other parochial duties, but he also made approaches to married women while their men were away. Pedro kept the wife of a man named Joaquin in his house while the husband was absent. The final offence, which had caused great uproar, happened when some women went to ask Pedro to baptize a child. The priest told the women that he could not baptize the child on that day, but he would do it the next day. However, Pedro invited the women to stay at his place, and tried to make advances to one of them while she was asleep.¹⁴¹ The case of Pedro Correa da Silva shows how a priest, in this case one born in Angola, showed little interest in the tenets of Catholicism. One can ask, however, whether Pedro would ever have been accused by the Inquisition if he had not made passes at married women.

Some priests took their work more seriously. Like the missionaries in Kongo, European priests in Angola sometimes resorted to burning "idol houses" and "fetish objects". According to Sweet, these were arranged as grand public

¹³⁹ AHU, Angola Cx. 31, doc. 6, Ofício de Bispo de Angola, 23 February 1739. This was the Benedictine Father D. Frei António do Desterro Malheiros, who held office from 1738 to 1745.

¹⁴⁰ AHU, Angola Cx. 31, doc. 9, Ofício de Bispo de Angola, 23 February 1739. Complaints about the licentious life of priests continued during the governorship of Souza Coutinho and beyond. See AHU, Angola Cx. 51, doc. 63, Carta do Governador, 16 December 1767; Cx. 61, doc. 75, Relações do Bispo de Angola, 11 June 1778.

¹⁴¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 1483. In his examination record, Pedro's parents were named as Manuel Correa da Silva and Felipa Luis. He had been baptised in Luanda, and was 47 years old at the time. Pedro died before his prosecution was formally completed.

displays meant to demonstrate the impotence of African spirits and religious actors.¹⁴² One of the missionaries to describe the burning of “idols” in Angola was the Jesuit Father Pero Tavares who, together with three other priests, tried to catechize the people of Dongo in 1632. Tavares related how he set fire to all the “idols” dedicated to ancestral spirits that he found in a cemetery.¹⁴³ In many cases, missionaries found that when they later returned to places where they had burned African religious objects, the “idols” had returned to their original settings.¹⁴⁴

5.3.3 Orthopraxy and Syncretism in Angola

For some Portuguese administrators, African religious practices posed a diabolic threat. In order to suppress all “superstitions”, the governor of Angola asked the king in 1693 to establish a religious tribunal that would include the bishop of Angola, the Jesuit fathers and the prelates of different religious orders, all learned and capable of judging such cases.¹⁴⁵ In some cases, it could even be argued that the views of the missionaries came close to paranoia. Father Lorenzo da Lucca reported from Luanda in 1716 that the proliferation of “diabolical witchcraft” in the region would soon lead to dire consequences unless African healers were punished. In his view, the sorcerers had the power to corrupt all of the local people, even threatening His Majesty’s reign, not only the law of God.¹⁴⁶ Around 20 years later, Governor Rodrigo Cezar de Menezes saw similar threats in his dominion. He demanded more missionaries to Angola before the whole country was ruined.¹⁴⁷

Not all Europeans viewed Angola’s religious life as starkly but were still highly critical of Atlantic Creole Christianity as it was practiced in the colony. The prefect of the Capuchin mission in Central Africa, Father Rosario dal Parco, sent a detailed report to Rome in 1760. He estimated that the number of Catholics in Angola was as high as two million, but these were people who had merely been baptized without any Christian teaching before or after their “conversion”. Parco condemned this as a practice that clearly violated the recommendations of the Council of Trent. His report did not include details from all interior districts, but he noted that circumcision, superstition, and “invocation

¹⁴² Sweet 2003, p. 110.

¹⁴³ *Exploração á Africa*, p. 356. For an example from Kongo from the year 1693, see MacGaffey 1986, p. 82, and from 1699, Thornton 1998b, pp. 72-73. The public burning of African sacred objects was also common in Brazil. See Pereira 1939, vol. 1, p. 128.

¹⁴⁴ *Exploração á Africa*, p. 357.

¹⁴⁵ Brasio 1952-, vol. XIV, doc. 130, pp. 296-303.

¹⁴⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 86, ff. 39-40.

¹⁴⁷ AHU, Angola Cx. 28, doc. 9 and doc. 60, Cartas de Governador de Angola, 12 June 1734 and 20 March 1735.

of the Devil” were practiced, for example, in Bengo and Massangano, where all the people were in his view Catholics. The report also mentions two ordeals being used in Cahenda. The poison ordeal *bulungo* was used to find out who was a witch, and another ordeal known as *feu (fuogo)* to divine who had stolen something. Other superstitions included believing in omens such as birdsong and dreams.¹⁴⁸

In Luanda, the situation was barely any better. According to Parco, the religious space of Luanda was gendered. If there was a lot to hope for regarding participation of men in Catholic rituals, women rarely participated in Mass and were generally less familiar with Catholic teachings. Africans continued to observe *kijilas* or various taboos in Luanda. They believed that ignoring their traditional practices would cause illness. Belief in witchcraft was also prevalent among some Luandans, who said that its use by their enemies could cause death.¹⁴⁹

The syncretistic nature of Atlantic Creole Christianity was also observed by Parco in Luanda. His report revealed that Catholic priests sold relics to people who used Catholic objects as protective amulets.¹⁵⁰ Other documents confirm that the market for Christian objects, observed in the late sixteenth century, was still in place in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In 1767, Portuguese soldiers confiscated a statue of Our Lady of Conception among African “idols” during one of their campaigns in the interior of Angola, showing that Catholic images were ardently adopted and placed among traditional objects of devotion.¹⁵¹ Central Africans actively sought to obtain these objects from churches, either by stealing them or by persuading someone else to do so. In the 1750s, a slave named Luis André obtained a chalice from a certain Pedro Oliveira de Pinto, who had stolen a communion plate and a chalice from a chapel. As compensation Pedro received a bottle of *aguardente* for each. The chalice was later seized from Luis André and he was sentenced to a year of penal servitude.¹⁵² A report by Bishop Alexandre in 1788 also pointed to the obvious syncretism that had become a part of African religious practice in Angola. Chalices and other holy ornaments had disappeared from the majority of churches and were used by Africans in their rituals. Holy images were placed in African homes alongside traditional statues, leading the bishop to state that images of Christ were adored side by side with “the Devil”.¹⁵³

Attempts to correct the religious and moral failings, from both

¹⁴⁸ Parco 1963, pp. 365-368.

¹⁴⁹ Parco 1963, pp. 362-363.

¹⁵⁰ Parco 1963, p. 362.

¹⁵¹ AHU, Angola Cx. 51, doc. 19, Carta do Governador Geral de Angola, 3 April 1767. In this case, the statue was sent to Brazil for restoration.

¹⁵² AHU, Angola Cx. 53, doc. 37, Sentenças da Junta, 30 July 1769.

¹⁵³ AHU, Angola Cx. 73, doc. 28, Fr. Alexandre Bispo de Malaca, 20-24 June 1788.

Portuguese and Catholic points-of-view, of the local population gained new momentum in the 1760s during the governorship of Sousa Coutinho, who focused his attention on rebuilding churches and ending all superstitions in Angola. In 1765, the Governor attacked the elaborate African burial ceremonies, *entambes*, in Luanda. Catholic and African rituals both coexisted in these funerals. What was so offensive for Sousa Coutinho in the *entambes* was that Africans did not seem to follow the formalities and civilities that he expected. Instead, the people who mourned the deceased wore a cord around their heads and cried out aloud for several days. Then, a large crowd of people followed the funeral procession to the grave site, producing “disorder” that clashed with “purity of the religion” and good habits. The prohibition declared that no one should consent to *entambes* and that Africans should not accompany the deceased to the burial site.¹⁵⁴

Besides showing the importance of burial ceremonies for Africans, Sousa Coutinho’s prohibition also shows that African religious practices were not eradicated from Central Africa simply because the Portuguese built Catholic churches in Angola. Instead, most Central Africans retained their traditional religious customs and beliefs. To improve the habits of the Christian community, Sousa Coutinho directed *capitães-mores* (captain-majors) in the *presídios* to make sure that everyone was baptized. Apparently, the governor was upset that some Africans refused to pay tithes on the pretext that they were not Christians.¹⁵⁵ Although the prohibition of the *entambes* and the subsequent directives clearly had a religious motivation, they have to be seen in the broader context of the Pombaline reforms being implemented throughout the Portuguese overseas possessions as well. More than correcting the morals of Africans, their goal was to introduce good governance and effective administration in Angola.¹⁵⁶

These decrees proved to be insignificant for Africans living in the port cities and the interior. Moreover, Portuguese residents and their descendants partook in the formation of Atlantic Creole culture and absorbed the syncretistic religion of Angola.¹⁵⁷ Many Europeans, even preachers, adopted African customs soon after they arrived in Luanda.¹⁵⁸ Portuguese officials complained that the settlers who came to Angola were not interested in spreading “official”

¹⁵⁴ AHU, Angola Cx. 49, doc. 4, Cópia do Bando que proíbe os Entambes, e varios indignos abuzos, 9 January 1765.

¹⁵⁵ AHU, Angola Cx. 49, doc. 33, Carta de Governador de Angola, 30 June 1765, and Carta aos Capitaens môres dos Prezídios de Angola, 20 June 1765. The practice of collecting tithes was felicitously commented by Silva Corrêa, 1937, vol. 1, p. 94, who noted that the people were obliged to pay tithes to a God that they knew only through irritating usury.

¹⁵⁶ Machado 1998.

¹⁵⁷ Thornton 2007, p. 99.

¹⁵⁸ AHU, Angola Cx. 39, doc. 94, Carta do Governador D. Antonio Alvares da Cunha, 6 December 1754.

Catholicism and Portuguese culture. This can partly be explained by the fact that many settlers were Portuguese “*crístãos novos*” or “New Christians”, whose forefathers had been forced to convert to Christianity. Among these people were individuals who had been condemned by the Inquisition and banished to Angola as a punishment. The majority of the Portuguese who were registered by the officials in Luanda between 1714 and 1757 were deported criminals, Gypsies or Jews.¹⁵⁹ Rosário dal Parco named the New Christians and deported criminals as the main cause for the Catholic decadence in Angola.¹⁶⁰ Clearly, these were people who were unconcerned about the upkeep of Catholic orthodoxy.

The Jewish or “New Christian” presence in the colony of Angola was significant. Circumcision was an important tradition that both Jews and Central Africans held in common. The Capuchin missionary Lorenzo da Lucca reported in 1716 that, in Luanda, both white and black boys were circumcised in a synagogue.¹⁶¹ This practice was later noted in the governor’s correspondence as well. The Jews who had been banished to Angola from Portugal were at home among those Central Africans who practiced circumcision.¹⁶² The merchant João Teixeira de Carvalho was one of those accused of being Jewish. He was nominated to the post of schoolmaster of the school in Luanda in 1727, but his critics said that this “mulatto of the Hebrew race” from Benguela had lived in concubinage, traded with foreigners, and encouraged slaves to revolt against their masters. In 1749, missionaries complained that merchants in Angola were almost all New Christians who discredited baptism and marriage, and introduced circumcision as a substitute for baptism.¹⁶³

Jewish practices, however, were not the only troubling rituals adopted by Portuguese settlers in Angola. Open belief in African religious practices was not unusual. Luis Maia, the captain-major of Golungo, was denounced in 1715 for using the poison ordeal *bulungo* to condemn suspected witches in his district. On the occasion that led to the denunciation the *bulungo* was administered to various people. Two of the men were found guilty in the ordeal, and they exited Maia’s house “stumbling around like drunks”. The men were sent to their families almost dead from the poison, and were ordered to be thrown into a river, where their bodies were later seen by many. It was claimed that Maia also employed African healers and diviners, burying “fetishes” in the ground at his dwelling place to escape punishment from the governor.¹⁶⁴

Other documents from the late eighteenth century confirm that

¹⁵⁹ Venâncio 1996, p. 48. On the role of Gypsies in the colonization of Angola, see Couto, 1971.

¹⁶⁰ Parco 1963, p. 363.

¹⁶¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 86, f. 39.

¹⁶² AHU, Angola Cx. 38, doc. 81, Ofício do Governador D. Antonio Alvares da Cunha, 18 December 1753.

¹⁶³ Heywood 2002, pp. 94-95.

¹⁶⁴ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 86, ff. 47-60.

African spirits had become common among whites. Bishop Azevedo's report of 1778 categorized the people of Angola into two classes: first, the blacks and mulattoes, educated "since childhood into the licentious life of Africa" and, second, the criminals expelled from Portugal.¹⁶⁵ A report written in 1788 by Bishop Alexandre argued that the mulattoes and the few whites in the interior had to a large extent adopted African religious customs. They participated in African puberty rituals and in the *entambes*, used the services of diviners, and engaged in the adoration of African spirits. Further, many of them were polygamous and practiced circumcision.¹⁶⁶

One of the most detailed investigations of religious life in Angola was conducted in the 1740s and 1750s, when the former *capitão-mor* or captain-major of Ambaca, João Pereira da Cunha was accused of witchcraft and idolatry along with his black concubine, Catarina Juliana.¹⁶⁷ Cunha was accused of believing in "many superstitions" that violated Catholic doctrines and that were popular among the "pagans" (*gentios*) of the *Reino de Angola*, especially when they suffered from infirmities. Another accusation that was leveled against Cunha concerned the adoration of "idols" or "pagan gods," in other words idolatry. The original denunciation, written down in April 1746, described in detailed fashion how Angolan religious specialists had mixed certain roots and herbs with water and washed the *capitão-mor* with it, in order to protect him from misfortune. It was also claimed they had brought figures made of wood to Cunha's house to "consult" them about his private affairs. One denunciation made a reference to a spirit named Kibuku, which took possession of one of Cunha's slaves. This spirit possessed a *parda* woman when the sorcerers played various instruments. Kibuku allegedly helped the *capitão-mor* conduct his business more successfully.

Other denunciations were recorded in Ambaca in July 1748. These all came from soldiers serving in Ambaca. They described João Pereira da Cunha as an enemy of the faith, who had little or no fear of God, and who had publicly used magic while presiding in Ambaca. These denunciations included a reference to *Soba* Domingos of Mucori, or simply *Soba* Mucori, who was allegedly a "great sorcerer" and assisted the *capitão-mor* in his magical arts when he was sick. The denunciations named the three African deities that were adored by João Pereira da Cunha. Along with the aforementioned Kibuku, these were named as Muta and Gangazumba. Kibuku was "invoked to bring all commerce in his house," Muta served to "divine all he wants to know" and Gangazumba to "take life from his enemies". The witnesses also claimed that Cunha's former slave, Marsela, had served as a *xinguila*, or a spirit medium.

¹⁶⁵ AHU, Angola Cx. 61, doc. 75, Relações do Bispo de Angola, 11 June 1778.

¹⁶⁶ AHU, Angola Cx. 73, doc. 28, Fr. Alexandre Bispo de Malaca, 20-24 June 1788.

¹⁶⁷ The investigation is described in detail in Kananoja 2010.

She had allegedly received one of these spirits in her head and the spirit had spoken through her mouth. Marsela later passed away, but Catarina Juliana was also accused of being a *xinguila*. In fact, it was claimed that Catarina was the one responsible for the care of the spirits.

During the investigation, which lasted for over 15 years, more than 30 witnesses were heard. These hearings showed that the accusations against Cunha had been devised by his enemies and were inventions of imagination, motivated by jealousy as Cunha gained a foothold in the slaving business in Ambaca. But the allegations did reflect religious realities in Ambaca. The deities and practices described in the denunciations were prevalent there, although it could not be proven that the *capitão-mor* had actually engaged in any unorthodox practices. Cunha was posthumously declared innocent, but he most likely had received help from African healers when he had been sick. However, it was his concubine Catarina Juliana who took the blame for seeking the help of healers.

The investigations were concluded in Luanda in June 1761. José de Matos Moreira, the incumbent *commissario* of the Inquisition in Angola, wrote his opinion of João Pereira da Cunha's and Catarina Juliana's case and, at the same time, offered a glimpse into the creolized realities of Angola. He had arrived in Angola in 1729 and knew the colony intimately, so he was well qualified to offer an opinion on the case. Moreira set out a damning opinion of the two priests who had served in Ambaca at the time of Cunha's administration, describing them as ignorant and talentless. João Pereira da Cunha, on the contrary, was described by Moreira as a learned man who had studied in Portugal, and had continued studying with the Jesuits in Luanda when he first arrived in the city. Cunha was aware of the crass ignorance of the priests in Ambaca and treated them with little or no respect. This did not make him a less devout Catholic. He donated copiously to the annual festivals that were held in Luanda on the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrows, and participated in Mass regularly. Lastly, Moreira gave an indicting report on the creolized nature of Angolan society. He wrote that blacks were all attracted to divination and idolatry. Consequently the whites born in Angola were drawn to these practices, for they were suckled by blacks and their first language, character, food, and all the other customs were those of the blacks. Moreira's 32 years of residence in Luanda and his 15 years as prosecutor of the ecclesiastical court had given him ample evidence of these practices.

Moreira's description continued to echo some 30 years later. The description of Angolan society, written by Silva Corrêa in the 1780s and 1790s, shows how syncretistic practices had infiltrated into the heart of the Catholic Church and were commonly mixed with Catholic sacraments. The majority of whites tolerated these "pagan" practices and even took part in them actively. The *entambes*, funeral rituals, had not ceased but were still celebrated with

revolting “superstitions”, including the beating of drums and dancing. African music was also part of the wedding ceremonies that took place in churches and was heard in surrounding neighborhoods. The bride danced and took part in the festivities of the slaves as well.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, in a medical treatise published in 1799, Angola’s former chief-physician, José Pinto de Azeredo, gave a damning description of *entambes*:

“The custom of mourning the dead among the blacks, which is called *entame* [sic], is the origin of vices, excess, irreligion, and disease. The preaching of the clergy, the sword of the Church, nor the force of secular arm has not been sufficient to destroy this heathen ceremony. As soon as the body is taken to be buried, both sexes convene in the house of the deceased, closing the doors and keeping it dark for many days, all crying at certain hours, and lamenting in loud shrieks the absence of the deceased, [affecting especially] his children, his relatives, and friends. This favor made to the widow, or to any other relative, is always accompanied by lots of wine, lots of *alo* (which is a beverage they make of fermented maize), lots of Brazilian *aguardente*, already falsified at taverns, of venereal excess, and other disorder that brings mortal consequences.”¹⁶⁹

Heywood has argued that Catholicism became more Africanized in the colony of Angola because nonbaptized Africans, both slaves and free blacks, made up the largest segment of the population. Masters regularly allowed their unconverted slaves to represent them in church celebrations or to take their place in receiving indulgences on Saints’ days, giving an African face to Portuguese Catholicism in Angola.¹⁷⁰ Although large segments of Angola’s population were baptized, most of them never received any Christian teachings. Silva Corrêa concluded that, inland from Luanda, one found “paganism in all its purity”.¹⁷¹

5.3.4 Catholic Lay Brotherhoods in Angola

One important institution, which facilitated the spread of Atlantic Creole Christianity in Central Africa, were the Catholic lay brotherhoods that spread to Brazil and Africa with the Portuguese overseas expansion. In Luanda, these were originally established by Portuguese soldiers and merchants and excluded Africans from their membership. In the late seventeenth century, the most respectful whites were members of the brotherhood of Corpo de Deus (Body

¹⁶⁸ Corrêa 1937, vol. 1, pp. 87-89.

¹⁶⁹ Azeredo 1799, pp. 54-55. Azeredo used this passage as an introduction to warn his readers about the immoderate use of alcohol that “excited” the endemic diseases in Angola.

¹⁷⁰ Heywood 2002, p. 101.

¹⁷¹ Corrêa 1937, vol. 1, p. 93.

of Christ). The majority of whites belonged to the brotherhoods of Senhora do Socorro and Saint Francis Xavier.¹⁷² Following the example of Luanda's white residents, Africans in Angola established religious confraternities of their own. An early example of the organizing of these societies comes from Luanda, where a brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary was established in 1628 during the bishopric of D. Frei Francisco do Soveral. The chaplain of the rosary brotherhood was obliged to absolve, catechize and handle burials in Kimbundu.¹⁷³ In July 1658, members of the black rosary brotherhood wrote to the cardinals in Rome requesting the same privileges that applied to white brotherhoods. They argued that in the service of God, all people, including blacks and slaves, should be equal.¹⁷⁴

By the last decade of the seventeenth century, confraternities of blacks had sprung up in Luanda and Massangano. According to Cadornega, the church of Luanda's black rosary brotherhood was well ornamented, with a frontal, pulpit, and vestry. Besides the image of the Virgin, the images of Saint Benedict of Nursia and Saint Dominic had been placed on the altars. A special place had been reserved for Saint Benedict the Moor. Because of his origin – his parents were black slaves from Africa living in Sicily – Saint Benedict received a dedicated following among Central Africans. A legend emerged that Saint Benedict's mother was from Kisama in Angola.¹⁷⁵ In Massangano, free blacks attended a church dedicated to Saint Benedict. There was also a black rosary brotherhood in the village, which congregated three times a week to pray the rosary.¹⁷⁶ By the late seventeenth century, churches dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary had also been established in Cambambe and Presídio das Pedras.¹⁷⁷ In 1693, a governor's report described that Luanda's rosary brotherhood was served by a chaplain paid by them, who officiated their feasts and masses on Saturdays, Sundays, and Saints' Days.¹⁷⁸

In the mid-eighteenth century, the black brotherhood in Luanda was still active and played an important role in the lives of Atlantic Creole Christians as a focus of their devotion. This is revealed by the Inquisition proceedings of Catarina Juliana, who was a devotee of Our Lady of the Rosary. She was a member of the rosary brotherhood in Luanda, participating eagerly in the

¹⁷² Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 14.

¹⁷³ Reginaldo 2005, p. 35.

¹⁷⁴ Brasio 1952-, Vol. XII, doc. 66, pp. 164-166.

¹⁷⁵ Cadornega 1940, vol. I, p. 454 and Cadornega 1942, vol. III, pp. 26-27. For many Africans, the pantheon of Catholic religious figures was analogous to African ancestral spirits. Besides having recognizable characteristics and personality traits, they possessed the magical power to transform the condition of those on earth. According to Sweet 2003, pp. 205-206, the saints were called upon to help Africans with their specific temporal concerns. The saints took their place alongside ancestral spirits, although they did not replace them.

¹⁷⁶ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, pp. 122-123.

¹⁷⁷ Kiddy 2005, p. 33.

¹⁷⁸ Brasio 1952-, Vol. XIV, doc. 137, p. 343.

festivities that were held on the feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary. Born a slave, Catarina had been raised as a Catholic since infancy. She had been instructed in Christian doctrine by her godmother Barbara. After coming of age, she went to church regularly, heard Mass and sermon, confessed, and participated in the communion. There is no doubt that Catarina met the basic conditions of a good Catholic. Still, in stark contrast with Catholic doctrines, she resorted to the services of African healers and spirit mediums, which raises a question about her religious identity. Catarina's Christian identity was emphasized by her participation in sacraments and in the activities of the rosary brotherhood in Luanda. For Catarina and countless other Central Africans, Christianity was just as important as their indigenous beliefs. However, as with so many other baptized Catholics in Central Africa, she relied on healers and spirit mediums when necessary. Whereas some Portuguese officials and clergymen saw this as problematic, Central Africans did not consider these different religious traditions to be in conflict. Rather, the adoption of Christianity gave another potential source for combating life's hardships and difficulties.¹⁷⁹ For enslaved Central Africans taken to Minas Gerais, the processes of religious adaptation continued in their new home communities.

5.4 Catholic Church and Africans in Minas Gerais

5.4.1 Church and the Lay Brotherhoods in Mineiro Society

The earliest years of gold fever and settlement in Minas Gerais were chaotic and disorderly and it took some time for the Portuguese Crown to catch up with appropriate legislation to control the region. The Church was the first institution to attempt to establish administrative boundaries in the area. The Church arrived in 1703, when a priest was sent by the bishop of Rio de Janeiro to establish churches in Minas Gerais. The captaincy of Minas Gerais, however, was slow to emerge. First, in 1709, mining areas and São Paulo were separated from the captaincy of Rio de Janeiro when Portuguese administration, headed by Governor Antônio de Albuquerque Coelho de Carvalho, was established. Three of the most prominent mining villages, Ribeirão do Carmo (Mariana), Vila Rica d'Albuquerque (Ouro Preto) and Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Sabará (Sabará), were elevated to the status of towns in 1711. The first three *comarcas* or districts, Vila Rica, Rio das Velhas, and Rio das Mortes, were delineated in 1714. The administrative framework was finalized during the

¹⁷⁹ Kananoja 2010.

governorship of Dom Pedro de Almeida (1717-1721), the Count of Assumar, on whose urging the Portuguese Crown separated the mining region from the captaincy of São Paulo and created the captaincy of Minas Gerais.¹⁸⁰

Once the administrative structure of Minas Gerais was in place, the Crown sought to normalize life in the mining settlements. The Church was seen as an important institution in bringing morality to the region, but most of the clergy that represented the Church was mistrusted by the Crown. Religious orders were not granted licenses to operate in Minas Gerais, which was quite unprecedented in the Portuguese colonial world. Minas Gerais was the only region where the religious orders were rigorously banned. Boxer noted that the ban was repeated at frequent intervals throughout the eighteenth century, so its enforcement left a lot to be desired.¹⁸¹ In 1738, the Governor of Minas Gerais received orders from the king to arrest any secular clergy who remained in the region without a license.¹⁸²

If clerical disorder was prevalent in Angola in the eighteenth century, it was common also in Minas Gerais. Far from uplifting the morals of the miners and the slaves, the clergy was often seen by Crown officials as corrupt and a bad influence on the people. Many of the secular clergy led licentious lives, ignoring royal orders to leave the captaincy and living publicly with their concubines. Priests charged excessive prices for their services, which did not increase their popularity. Complaints about licentious and corrupt priests continued throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁸³

The Catholic Church, however, came to thrive in colonial Minas Gerais through the activities of lay brotherhoods. The brotherhoods promoted and organized religious feasts, built and maintained churches and chapels, and offered religious services for their members. They were the official Church's auxiliary and complementary force. After the Crown, in the early years of exploration, made clear that religious orders had no place in the mining region, the responsibility for the implementation of Catholic doctrines fell on the laity. The brotherhoods hired diocesan priests to officiate Mass and other services in their churches. The daily running of church activities was thus in the hands of laymen, who also bore the financial brunt for religious celebrations.¹⁸⁴

The first official task for a new brotherhood was to write its *compromisso* or statutes. This document lay out all the rules and regulations by which the brotherhood would be governed. However, in many cases brotherhoods could and did function for many years before a *compromisso* was written and sent

¹⁸⁰ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸¹ Boxer 1962, p. 180.

¹⁸² Ordem de 21 de Fevereiro de 1738, in "Religioens, clerigos e mater.^{as} Ecclesiasticas," *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro*, 16:1, p. 398.

¹⁸³ Kiddy 2005a, p. 71.

¹⁸⁴ Boschi 2007, pp. 59-60.

to authorities for approval. The statutes defined positions of power within the brotherhood's governing body, or *Mesa*. Administrative positions included those of secretary, treasurer and procurator (of which there were often two). These officials took care of the brotherhoods' books, including accounts, minutes of meetings, election lists, and records of Mass. There were also celebratory positions within the brotherhoods that were deemed just as important as the administrative offices. Male and female judges were elected for each of the saints venerated by the members. These positions required a substantial contribution from the officeholder. The remaining members of the governing body supervised the day-to-day affairs of brotherhoods' administration.¹⁸⁵

Lay brotherhoods had a central place in promoting sociability in the nascent mining towns. By the time the first towns were established in 1711, there already existed at least one brotherhood in each. *Mineiro* brotherhoods also reflected social stratification early on, as the wealthiest and most influential members of society congregated in their own brotherhoods, such as the brotherhood of *Santíssimo Sacramento* (Holiest Sacrament). Boschi has counted that 322 lay brotherhoods were established in colonial Minas Gerais between 1706 and 1820. Each had a patron saint that reflected the social origins of its members. There were 53 different types of brotherhoods. While the brotherhoods of *Santíssimo Sacramento* were the second most popular among the people of the mining region, the most popular patron saint was Our Lady of the Rosary, especially venerated by black and colored brotherhoods. Rosary brotherhoods numbered 62, accounting for 19.3% of all brotherhoods in colonial Minas Gerais.¹⁸⁶

The establishment of black brotherhoods was not a phenomenon restricted to Minas Gerais as they existed throughout colonial Brazil.¹⁸⁷ The model for Brazilian brotherhoods came from Portugal, where the rosary brotherhoods in Lisbon had originally included both blacks and whites. By the late fifteenth century, blacks had formed their own organizations. Lay brotherhoods had the objective of advancing Catholic devotion in their communities. The most important event was the annual service held in honor of the patron saint. Members were expected to participate in the festivals of the brotherhoods. Brotherhood membership also guaranteed the administration of the Last Sacraments, a Christian funeral and burial, and the saying of masses for the soul of the departed. These benefits were also available to the spouse and children of a member if all dues had been paid.¹⁸⁸

Authorities encouraged the establishment of brotherhoods as an attempt

¹⁸⁵ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 80-81; Russell-Wood 1974, pp. 581-584.

¹⁸⁶ Boschi 1986, pp. 187-188 and Boschi 2007, p. 63.

¹⁸⁷ Russell-Wood 1974; Mulvey 1976.

¹⁸⁸ Russell-Wood 1974, pp. 591-593.

to incorporate blacks into Brazilian society. At the same time, brotherhoods offered the possibility of finding a position in the religious social system independent of slavery. For recently arrived Africans, there really existed no other legal possibilities, because all other types of association were prohibited. Black brotherhoods thrived on the premise of providing protection for their members and a meeting place for slaves away from the watchful eyes of their masters. They also provided an arena for maintaining African religious ethos, albeit in syncretistic forms.¹⁸⁹

The first priority for newly formed brotherhoods was to secure a physical space for its services and ceremonies. At the outset, black brotherhoods often had to be satisfied with permission to use an altar, either in the main church of the parish or in the church of another brotherhood. Their goal, however, was to build their own chapels and churches, if and when they could be afforded. A license to build a church was conceded by the Crown and Church authorities only if the brotherhood could show that it had enough funds to finance the expensive undertaking. The raising of funds required a great communal effort by blacks, unless funds were provided by a financial “protector” or a legacy. By constructing their own churches, brotherhoods gained autonomy from the control of the parish priest.¹⁹⁰

5.4.2 Slave Membership in the Rosary Brotherhoods

Rosary brotherhoods in Minas Gerais were not exclusively for the blacks, but allowed people of any color, “nation”, and gender to join. However, individual brotherhoods could define in their statutes whether only people of a certain color could join. Sometimes membership was overtly restricted to whites, as declared in the statutes of the rosary brotherhood of Cachoeira do Campo, established in 1713. However, a decade later the brotherhood had been taken over by blacks and was in practice dominated by them. Brotherhoods that had started with both black and white members could sometimes divide into two brotherhoods, as happened to one rosary brotherhood in Vila Rica in 1733. There were also instances of blacks wanting to create a brotherhood only for blacks. In Campo dos Carijós in 1743, blacks wrote to the king of Portugal stating that they had been expelled from the brotherhood of the whites. They requested that they be allowed to establish their own brotherhood, never wishing to be subjected to the whites again. Their statutes were accepted and they were allowed to worship

¹⁸⁹ Mulvey 1982, pp. 43-46.

¹⁹⁰ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 84-85; Russell-Wood 1974, p. 589. On the construction of the church of the rosary brotherhood in Mariana, see the detailed description in Pinheiro 2006, pp. 29-48.

without the intervention of the whites.¹⁹¹

According to Kiddy, by 1750 *mineiro* rosary brotherhoods had become intimately associated with the slave, free, and freed black population. Many of the brotherhoods were called the Brotherhood of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Blacks. This did not mean that whites would have dismissed the devotion or participation in brotherhoods dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. Use of the rosary as a devotional tool was widespread among the entire population, and the motivations for joining a certain brotherhood or several brotherhoods, were complex and personal.¹⁹²

Why did Africans and their descendants choose to join brotherhoods? Kiddy has argued that one of their motivations for joining the black rosary brotherhoods was to achieve a level of self-determination in their own organizations. Brotherhood membership helped blacks to create an identity distinct from that of the whites, although black brotherhoods also had to include rules in their statutes that required some of the officers to be white. It is remarkable that blacks and whites shared the same confraternal space, but even more remarkable is that such a varied population of blacks formed a functioning community in an environment where their survival was constantly threatened by the violence of slavery. Enslaved individuals imported from different African regions diverged in their worldviews, languages, and customs. The black population in Minas Gerais included slaves as well as freedmen and women, and descendants of Africans born in Brazil.¹⁹³

Kiddy has shown that the rosary brotherhood in Ouro Preto's parish of Pilar had a high slave membership in the registration book (*livro de entradas*) covering the period 1724-1760. More than 80% of the members were slaves, and more than a third of the free members were identified as freed slaves. The records show that often a "household" of slaves joined the brotherhood together, usually all on the same day. Most of the masters whose slaves entered were white and male, but members also included slaves owned by female, *forro*, and *pardo* owners. Some of the masters served as officers in the brotherhood. According to Kiddy, most rosary brotherhoods had a smaller slave membership. In Cachoeira do Campo's rosary brotherhood, slaves were the majority (55.2%) in the 1720s, but after that their relative number dropped. In the period between the 1720s and 1780s they made up 43.1% of the brotherhood's membership.¹⁹⁴

Unlike some brotherhoods in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro, the brotherhoods of the rosary in Minas Gerais were never divided along ethnic

¹⁹¹ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 81-82.

¹⁹² Kiddy 2005a, p. 82.

¹⁹³ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 89-91.

¹⁹⁴ Kiddy 2005a, p. 92 and Appendix, Tables 6 and 7, p. 256.

Table 5.1, Origins of members in the rosary brotherhood of Mariana, 1754-1829

<i>Central Africa</i>	173	<i>West Africa</i>	330	<i>Unknown Africa</i>	49
Angola	123	Mina	185	Preto	43
Benguela	24	Courano	62	Caboes	1
Congo	15	Fon	25	Coutam	1
Rebolo	4	Lada	19	Goymeno	1
Ganguela	2	Cobu	10	Pemeno	1
Cabinda	1	Coura	9	Toco	1
Cabundo	1	Sabaru	8	Xambu	1
Maçangana	1	Nago	5		
Monjolo	1	Timbu	4	<i>Brazil</i>	82
Mucumbe	1	Ladano	2	Crioulo	71
		Gome	1	Pardo	10
<i>East Africa</i>	2			Cabra	1
Mozambique	2	<i>Islands</i>	10		
		Cabo Verde	9	<i>Europe</i>	1
		São Tomé	1	Branco	1

Source: Kiddy 1999, 235, Table 3¹⁹⁵

lines.¹⁹⁶ In Bahia, slaves from Angola congregated in rosary brotherhoods that they controlled throughout the eighteenth century with *crioulo* members. Only members claiming Angola or *crioulo* identity could be elected as judges in the governing board of the Bahian rosary brotherhoods.¹⁹⁷ In Rio de Janeiro, West Africans mainly from the Mina Coast were the majority in the brotherhood dedicated to Saint Elesbão and Saint Efigênia. In the course of the eighteenth century, this brotherhood came to be dominated by Africans identifying themselves as Mahis.¹⁹⁸

Rosary brotherhoods in Minas Gerais did not exclude their African members by regional origin. Brotherhood membership during the eighteenth century thus came to reflect the fluxes of slaves from different African regions as analyzed in Chapter 3. The rising proportion of Brazilian-born slaves was also reflected in membership lists. The records of the rosary brotherhood of Mariana (Table 5.1) list the entrance of 959 new members between 1754 and 1829. For 645 of

¹⁹⁵ I have adapted the original table by moving Cobu, Timbu, and Ladano from Unknown Africa in the original to West Africa.

¹⁹⁶ Kiddy 2005a, p. 118.

¹⁹⁷ Reginaldo 2005. On the evolution of Angolan identity in Salvador during the nineteenth century, see Trindade 2008.

¹⁹⁸ Soares 2000.

these, secretaries listed some description of their origin or color, either the African “nation” or if the member was Brazilian-born or color designations: *cabra*, *pardo*, *preto*, and *branco*.¹⁹⁹ *Preto* most likely indicated a person of African origin, as distinct from *crioulo*, a Brazilian-born black.

As Table 5.1 shows, West Africans, especially those denominated Mina, comprised the largest group overall. However, as Kiddy has demonstrated, huge numbers of Mina and other West Africans only appeared in the Mariana brotherhood in the first decade of the list of new members. Between 1754 and 1760, West Africans comprised 62% of the listed members. Their proportional numbers dropped to 23% during the 1760s, and between 1770 and 1780 to only 4%. After 1760, Africans identified as Angolas became the most frequent group to join the brotherhood. The proportion of *crioulos* also increased significantly following the late eighteenth century.²⁰⁰

The rosary brotherhood of Mariana was ethnically inclusive. This meant that slaves originating in different African regions had to find ways to overcome their linguistic and cultural differences and create a new corporate identity. Gradually, this process led to an identification based on color. It was their black color that unified members as a group. Further, the common experience of enslavement unified Africans, whatever their regional origin. However, this move towards an identity based on color only occurred gradually within the brotherhoods and in society as a whole.²⁰¹ The identities linking them to their different homelands were still being reflected in the day-to-day interactions between members. According to Kiddy, African identities also evolved into a mythic consciousness in which African “nations” continued to exist in ritual form as ambassadors to the court of the king and queen of the brotherhood.²⁰² African identities in Minas Gerais were complex in that they reflected strategies of joining together as a color group while at the same time retaining the memories tied to various African homelands.

Similar variations in the origins of members can be detected in the rosary brotherhood of São João del Rei (Table 5.2). The major difference between the brotherhoods in Mariana and São João del Rei was that, in the latter, the West African presence was considerably lower and Central Africa was the major origin for African members of the brotherhood. As discussed in Chapter 3, this was a result of São João del Rei’s location in southern Minas Gerais and its proximity to Rio de Janeiro. Between 1747 and 1805, the entrance of 1,500 new members was recorded in the registration book. For half of them (749), the secretary marked their origin or described their color. Of the members whose

¹⁹⁹ In this case, *pardo/a* was a mixture of *preta* (black) and *branco* (white), whereas *cabra* signified a mixture of *pardo/a* and *preto/a*.

²⁰⁰ Kiddy 1999, pp. 235-240.

²⁰¹ This process in the United States is described in Gomez 1998. For similar processes in nineteenth-century Salvador, see Nishida 2003.

²⁰² Kiddy 1999, p. 223.

Table 5.2, Origins of members in the rosary brotherhood of São João del Rei, 1747–1805

<i>Central Africa</i>	330	<i>West Africa</i>	88	<i>Unknown Africa</i>	34
Benguela	114	Mina	68	Preto	33
Angola	95	Nago	14	Muhambe	1
Congo	27	Cobu	3		
Rebolo	24	Carabari	1	<i>Brazil</i>	274
Ganguela	21	Costa Franca	1	Crioulo	181
Cabunda	10	Dagome	1	Pardo	80
Mucumbe	10			Cabra	11
Songo	9	<i>Islands</i>	2	Exposto	1
Cassange	6	Cabo Verde	2	Ladino	1
Cambunda	5				
Monjolo	5	<i>East Africa</i>	1	<i>Europe</i>	18
Camundonga	2	Mozambique	1	Branco	18
Bambambila	1				
Bambamboira	1				

Source: Kiddy 1999, 236, Table 4.²⁰³

identity was marked, Central Africans numbered 330 compared to 88 West Africans. Thus, there were almost four times as many Central Africans in the brotherhood. Benguela was the most common African identity, followed by Angola. However, the largest group was the Brazilian-born *crioulos*.

Even while black brotherhoods promoted an emerging sense of identity based on color among its members, groups could exist within the brotherhoods that were more concerned with promoting a collective identity tied to a specific African “nation”. The Mariana brotherhood included a large number of West Africans who identified themselves as Couranos. Pinheiro has shown that the Couranos of Mariana constructed tight-knit personal networks with each other. They married each other, acted as godparents in the baptisms of their countrymen and their countrymen’s children, and when freed, bought other Couranos as slaves. For example, Rosa dos Santos, a Courana freedwoman, owned seven adult slaves, five of whom were identified as Couranos. Pinheiro has argued that she recreated “a small Africa” within her household.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ I have adapted the original table by moving Cobu and Carabari from Unknown Africa in the original to West Africa.

²⁰⁴ Pinheiro 2006, pp. 144-167. On the social networks of Couranos constructed through godparenthood in Mariana, see Maia 2007, pp. 65-78.

Another case in point is the “Nobre Nação Benguela” or the “Noble Nation Benguela” that functioned within the rosary brotherhood in São João del Rei from the 1790s onwards. This shows that, although *mineiro* brotherhoods were ethnically inclusive in that they generally did not exclude their membership due to African regional origin, there were still factions organized according to origins within the brotherhoods. Thus, brotherhoods could and did function as arenas for establishing relationships of solidarity within groups hailing from the same regions in Africa.²⁰⁵ One of the most important features of the brotherhood for Benguelas and other Africans must have been the brotherhood’s function as a burial society. According to the Catholic idiom, the brotherhood took care of the souls of the deceased members, but for Africans, the brotherhood was a forum for respecting their ancestors. For Africans, the popularity of brotherhoods was based on the perception that they offered perhaps the only available opportunity to openly maintain a contact with ancestors.

In São João del Rei, Benguelas managed to buy their own house in 1803. The house, named “Palácio Real de Toda a Nação de Benguela” or the “Royal Palace of the Whole Benguela Nation”, was bought with the alms collected by the members of the brotherhood, including freedmen and slaves. The documentation does not reveal how the house was used and what purposes it served. Besides being a gathering place for Benguelas, it could have been used as a place for celebrations. It is also possible that it served as a place for maintaining African cultural practices and religious rituals that were not for white men to see.²⁰⁶ Cardoso, in her study of slave criminality in São João del Rei in the first half of the nineteenth century, has found references to a house where blacks gathered. According to whites, the house was a school of “horror and perversity” where Africans played games, danced, sang, celebrated, drank, and visited prostitutes.²⁰⁷ Whether the “royal palace” of the Benguelas was put to similar use is questionable, but having a common gathering place undoubtedly strengthened a feeling of group solidarity within the Benguela “nation”.

Although many scholars have emphasized the importance of brotherhoods for slaves, they have not tried to estimate the proportion of the slave population that joined the brotherhoods. One estimate of brotherhood membership to total population exists for the parish of Antônio Dias in Vila Rica between 1719 and 1818. Burial records demonstrate that whereas 48% of the free persons buried were brotherhood members, only 6% of the 8,200 buried slaves were brotherhood members. In the case of *forros*, the proportion was 35%.²⁰⁸

Estimating slave membership in brotherhoods is also possible using

²⁰⁵ This was also the case in Rio de Janeiro in the eighteenth century, where West African Mahi “nation” organized itself within the brotherhood of Santo Elesbão and Santa Efigênia. Soares 2000.

²⁰⁶ Brügger and Oliveira 2009, pp. 197-201.

²⁰⁷ Cardoso 2002.

²⁰⁸ Klein and Luna 2010, p. 280.

population data gathered throughout the eighteenth century. Starting with Mariana, the slave population declined between 1735 and 1749 from 26,892 to 20,539 individuals. Although specific data on the number of slaves in different towns is lacking for the second half of the eighteenth century, some inferences are possible. The total population in Vila Rica and Mariana was 78,618 in the 1776 census. In the 1786 and 1805 censuses, the proportion of enslaved blacks was around 40% (see Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 in Chapter 3). If the proportion of slaves was equal in 1776, this would put the total number of slaves in Vila Rica and Mariana to around 31,500. Moreover, assuming that the slave populations in Vila Rica and Mariana remained more or less equal, as they were in 1749, this would mean that between 1749 and 1776, the slave population in Mariana went down from around 20,000 to approximately 15,000. At the same time, the registration book of Mariana's rosary brotherhood listed the entrance of merely 959 members between the 1750s and 1820s. Around 65% of the 959 new members were slaves and the rest were freed or free-born blacks and colored. Surely, there were decades when the brotherhood admitted a higher number of new members. For example, in the 1760s, 212 (143 slaves) new members were listed, compared to only 21 (12 slaves) in the following decade. But even the annual average of 14 new slave members during the 1760s can be considered low, if the total number of slaves in Mariana was between 15,000 and 20,000.²⁰⁹

A similar conclusion can be reached in the case of São João del Rei. The slave population in the *comarca* or administrative division of Rio das Mortes, of which São João del Rei was the principal town, was approximately 14,000 in 1749. By 1776, the total population of the *comarca* had grown to over 82,000, and by it had 1808 almost doubled to 155,000 (see Tables 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 in Chapter 3). Using the proportion of slaves in the 1786 and 1805 censuses, the inferred number of slaves in the *comarca* was around 33,000 in 1776. Between 1754 and 1805, 1,500 new members joined the rosary brotherhood in São João del Rei. The number of new slave members in the 1790s, was 337, or 55% of the 613 new members who joined during that decade.²¹⁰ The annual average of 33 new slave members is minimal in relation to the slave population in São João del Rei, which was counted in the tens of thousands.

The significance of brotherhoods and their impact on slaves' life in Minas Gerais should not be exaggerated. If the numbers derived from

²⁰⁹ The legal status of the new members by decade is enumerated in Kiddy 1999, 233, Table 1. My estimate and discussion of the impact of brotherhoods on the total slave population should be treated with caution for three reasons: 1) There is no way of knowing whether all joining members were listed in the extant registration book. 2) The total number of slaves included slaves residing in the surrounding hamlets and mining camps, not only in the town itself, meaning that a high number of slaves were more distant from the town. Furthermore, they might have been able to join brotherhoods in the surrounding villages if this option was available to them. 3) The proportions of slaves in the different administrative divisions were not equal.

²¹⁰ Kiddy 1999, p. 234, Table 2.

membership lists in Mariana's and São João del Rei's rosary brotherhoods, and from the burial records in Vila Rica are indicative for the rest of the *capitania*, the large majority of African slaves in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais never benefited from brotherhood assistance in any way. Membership was limited to slaves living in towns, who moreover had to have some access to economic resources in order to pay the entrance and membership fees. While black brotherhoods also attracted former slaves and free-born colored members, many freed slaves were prevented from joining as they struggled to sustain themselves and their families. Although it was a remarkable achievement that some slaves did find ways to organize and sustain religious lay brotherhoods, it should be borne in mind that their impact was quantitatively limited.

5.4.3 The Public Face of Black Brotherhoods

The impact of the brotherhoods in promoting Catholicism among Africans and their descendants cannot be judged simply by the number of members in these organizations. Brotherhoods provided weekly masses at their churches, in which blacks could assemble and create their personal networks. Brotherhoods also had a great visibility during annual feast days, when they organized religious celebrations. Moreover, burials organized by brotherhoods were public events of great importance to the communities of Africans in Brazil.

Each lay religious brotherhood organized an annual feast day celebration dedicated to their patron saint. The festivals included religious observances and lavish processions. The feast day celebrations presented an opportunity for the community to gather together, and all the brotherhoods of the town would participate in the festivals. According to Kiddy, the election of black kings and queens was a cornerstone of the annual feast day celebration for rosary brotherhoods. The kings and queens played an important financial role in the rosary brotherhoods by making the highest contribution. Brotherhoods were instructed to use these contributions for the organization costs of the festival instead of the annual dues collected from all members. Descriptions of the coronations of black kings and queens emerge in the documentary record in Minas Gerais only in the second half of the eighteenth century.²¹¹

An early description of a rosary brotherhood's participation in public celebrations can be found in the *Triunfo Eucharístico*, a description of a gracious procession that took place in Vila Rica in 1733. During the celebrations the sacrament, which had been temporarily housed in the church of the rosary brotherhood, was carried to the newly completed main parish church. Numerous

²¹¹ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 97-98. On the coronations of black kings and queens in Brazil, see also Souza 2001 and Kiddy 2002.

brothers of the rosary took part in the proceedings, wearing long robes of white silk, with three officials carrying the statues of Saint Anthony of Catagerona, Saint Benedict, and Our Lady of the Rosary. According to Kiddy, the choice of the rosary church to house the sacrament demonstrates how the Church attempted to include the corporations of blacks within the larger society.²¹²

According to Mulvey, religious festivals of the black Brazilian confraternities were always syncretistic to some degree.²¹³ The celebrations in Minas Gerais also exhibited syncretistic tendencies early on, as ecclesiastical visitors to Cachoeira do Campo heard from several witnesses in August 1738. Although not directly citing brotherhoods as hotbeds of syncretism, the denunciations reveal the extent to which blacks interacted with some segments of the secular clergy in creating new norms of religious practice. On the feast day of the Holy Spirit (Pentecost) during that year, witnesses had seen several members of secular clergy acting deplorably. The priests had taken part in the processions in a wagon that was decorated with flowers. They had played secular songs with a guitar, which the witnesses considered inappropriate. Among the priests in the same wagon was a Brazilian-born former slave named Vicencia, a female who was dressed as a man. Accompanied by a guitar, she sang frivolous songs. Instead of finding it offensive, most onlookers had admired this part of the procession.²¹⁴

Vicencia and the denounced priests had all come from Ouro Preto, some 20 kilometers distant from Cachoeira do Campo, to take part in the celebrations. Also among the priests was Father Manoel de Bastos, a canon from Angola. His presence at the festival shows that it was not only slaves brought from Africa who influenced the formation of Afro-Brazilian Catholicism in Minas Gerais, but members of the clergy also helped the evolvement of rituals. Father Bastos had certainly experienced first-hand how African religious traditions and Catholic practices mixed in Angola and led to the formation of syncretistic Atlantic Creole Christianity. The captaincy of Minas Gerais did not lag behind in these developments. Instead, similar practices that had emerged in Kongo and Angola were taking shape in the Brazilian mining regions among Africans and their descendants at least by the 1730s. Although people generally approved of a certain degree of syncretism in *mineiro* folk Catholicism – Vicencia’s performance had also caused admiration in Cachoeira – the “indecentcy” of these festivals was condemned by ecclesiastic visitors. Accordingly, Father Bastos was ordered to leave the mining district within eight days.²¹⁵

Scholars have often emphasized that black brotherhoods were first

²¹² Kiddy 2005a, p. 88.

²¹³ Mulvey 1982, p. 43.

²¹⁴ AEAM, Devassas eclesiásticas, Z-1, ff. 107v-108.

²¹⁵ AEAM, Devassas eclesiásticas, Z-1, ff. 109.

and foremost organizations that introduced Africans to Catholic observances, and not fellowships that maintained African religious practices. However, in eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, a brotherhood member was at least once admonished by ecclesiastical visitors for maintaining African practices covertly. The member in question was Rosa Gomes, a black freedwoman, who was denounced in 1764 in Conceição do Mato Dentro. Rosa had served as a female judge in a black brotherhood, and had given her consent to celebrations of the blacks. Rosa owned a small store, where she arranged *batuques* for blacks on feast days and Sundays. She also invited *capitães do mato* or men employed in catching runaway slaves to these festivals.²¹⁶ Rosa's serving in a highly esteemed position in a black brotherhood did not restrain her from arranging celebrations that were clearly African in origin. In Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century, *batuque* was a general term that indicated celebrations in which blacks danced, sang, and played percussion instruments, including *atabaques* or hand drums. When witnesses in the ecclesiastical visits denounced *batuques*, they did not refer to African religious practices but saw *batuques* as a suspect and dangerous activity that enabled Africans to recreate forms of sociability prevalent in their homelands.

Perhaps the most important work of the black brotherhoods from an African perspective was the burial of deceased members. Miller has considered the lay brotherhoods primarily as burial societies that offered enslaved Africans the prospect of reunification by “flying back to Africa”. He has argued that

“[s]ince Africans at home sought identities derived from the solidarity of their ancestral communities, tracing the descendency of the living and linking those present with the others who had gone before, the ultimate assertion of one's self came through dying among one's own, or reuniting with those one had lost through death.”²¹⁷

In the early phases of colonization, private or almost secret African rituals may have been common in Minas Gerais. A description by Bishop Antônio de Guadalupe revealed in 1726 that slaves engaged in nocturnal gatherings, singing and playing instruments to mourn the dead. They also bought food and beverages in stores and after eating hurled the remnants into the graves.²¹⁸ Masters often broke the obligation to give their slaves a Christian burial, and were sometimes denounced in front of ecclesiastical visitors. A slave owner and miner named Silvestre Coutinho, resident in Itabira, was denounced in 1738 for burying his dead slaves in the woods. He customarily sent his slaves to

²¹⁶ AEAM, Devassas eclesiásticas, Z-10, ff. 15v, 19, 20v.

²¹⁷ Miller 2004, pp. 96-97.

²¹⁸ Reis 2003a, p. 145.

bury their deceased fellows instead of calling the nearest chaplain to give the deceased a Christian burial. The ecclesiastical visitors admonished Coutinho for shirking his Catholic duties as a master.²¹⁹

For the most part, the work of taking care of the dead was handled by the brotherhoods. The *compromissos* of the black brotherhoods usually described in detail how and where the burials of deceased members were to take place and how many masses would be celebrated for the dead. Besides conducting these masses at the time of death, the brotherhoods celebrated weekly or monthly masses for the dead throughout the year, depending on the financial status of the brotherhood. The celebration of masses ensured that the dead were not only helped in the Other World but also remained part of the community of living through rituals of remembrance.²²⁰

In most cities in colonial Brazil, the brotherhood of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia* controlled the burial of people because other brotherhoods were not usually allowed to possess funeral biers. However, the *Misericórdias* did not spread to colonial Minas Gerais and black rosary brotherhoods, keeping their own bier, managed the burial of their members. Rosary brotherhoods usually had their own graves within their churches. The placement of the corpses in the church floor had multiple meanings for the brotherhoods' members, depending upon the regions from which they originated. Most importantly, brotherhoods took care of the bodies and souls of the dead, guaranteeing that they were able to join ancestors. In this way, the links that tied brotherhood membership to their remembered African past were strengthened.²²¹

5.4.4 Religious Identities of Africans

Joining a Catholic lay brotherhood had a different impact on an individual's religious identity depending upon contact with Brazil's official religion before taking up membership. For some Central Africans, particularly those who had been members of brotherhoods in Angola or Kongo, becoming a "brother" or "sister" of the rosary in Minas Gerais would not have been a big leap. However, some Central Africans and almost all West African slaves had their first contact with Catholicism only after arriving in Brazil, where they were baptized and then possibly instructed in the tenets of Catholicism. For some masters, teaching their slaves was not a primary or even a secondary concern. Whether slaves had

²¹⁹ AEAM, Devassas eclesiásticas, Z-1, ff.19v-20, 23v. For another example, see AEAM, Devassas eclesiásticas, 1730-31, ff. 71v-72. Slave owners in Pernambuco often cast sick slaves into the woods, retrieving them if they recovered but otherwise leaving them to die there without sacraments, as complained about by Bishop Manuel Álvares da Costa in 1710. Sweet 2011, p. 48.

²²⁰ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 98-99.

²²¹ Kiddy 2005a, pp. 99-100.

been baptized prior to their capture and enslavement obviously did not affect their zealotry when becoming members of the rosary brotherhoods. Some members were more zealous and committed to Catholic orthodoxy while others were less interested in the doctrinal aspects. However, for some Africans the shift in their religious identity was greater and the adjustments they made to conform to the dominant society were significant.

It is almost impossible to measure how brotherhood membership affected the religious identities of Africans. Religious motives were perhaps not the only reason to join a brotherhood. Other aspects such as the possibility of building a network of friends and the social prestige attached to brotherhood membership must have been important factors as well. Although primary sources that would point to the formation of Catholic identities among Africans are lacking, testaments offer a cursory way to look at this question. Higgins has noted that, in their testaments, people made indirect donations to the church by leaving a part of their assets to brotherhoods. They also allocated fees for masses to be said for their soul and the souls of others that they held dear. Higgins, who has studied testaments in Sabará, points out that the practice of allocating funds for masses was widespread among testators in the eighteenth century. In granting bequests to their souls, colonists were in fact donating a part of their assets to the Catholic Church. The assets that wealthy colonists donated to the Church also included slaves.²²²

People did not have to name the Church as their sole heir, but nonrelatives could be named as well. Higgins has suggested that testators made conscious choices whether they wanted to transfer their assets to the Church or to their near relatives or intimate friends. These can be seen as indications of their acceptance or refusal of the values represented by the Church. For example, the former slave and widow Izabel Pinheira, identifying herself as Angola, donated her entire belongings, including her two slaves and their children to the Church. She set manumission prices for her slaves that they were to pay to the Church. On the contrary, Caetano Fernandes da Silva, a freed Mina slave, named a friend rather than the Church to inherit the bulk of his wealth. Caetano was a member of a lay brotherhood, and he arranged for masses to be said for his soul, for the souls of those who had been dear to him, for the souls of his slaves, and finally for all souls in purgatory. Furthermore, Caetano promised to pay for the painting of two walls in a church in his home parish. Still, Caetano made the far less common choice of naming a friend rather than the Church as his heir. Antonio Gonçalves inherited 13 slaves from his friend, a considerable wealth by local standards. Moreover, Caetano's testament decreed for the manumission of six of his slaves, considerably more valuable than the commission to paint two

²²² Higgins 1999, pp. 94-97.

walls in the church. According to Higgins, his unwillingness to have the other slaves handed over to the Church suggests a strong sense of identification with his captives and a more limited embrace of Catholicism.²²³

Social prestige attached to brotherhood membership was important for aspiring former slaves, who constantly had to fight the limitations imposed on the freed colored by the dominant society. The number of freed Africans who succeeded in gaining the admiration of their fellows and who were able to establish their respectability in the eyes of white people remained limited. One way to garner prestige was through assuming leadership positions in a brotherhood. This was the case with Joanna Gomes, who dictated her testament in São José del Rei in 1761. Joanna had served as the queen of the brotherhood of the rosary for several years. She bequeathed her belongings to the brotherhood and was buried in the chapel of the brotherhood. Her position certainly rendered her with social authority that was otherwise barely attainable by black women in colonial Brazil.²²⁴

Another way to gain prestige in *mineiro* society would have been to join more than one brotherhood. Maria de Souza da Conceição, an Angolan freedwoman living in Mariana, paid annual dues to both the rosary brotherhood and the brotherhood of Saint Ifigênia. She had arrived from Angola baptized and demonstrated an extensive commitment to retaining her Catholic identity in Brazil. Her testament shows that she also cultivated a close relationship with members of the archconfraternity of Saint Francis that only accepted *pardos* as members. All of these brotherhoods were to accompany her burial to the church of the rosary brotherhood. She left 12 drams of gold as alms to the black brotherhoods of the rosary, Saint Ifigênia and Saint Benedict, and ten drams of gold to the archconfraternity of the *pardos*.²²⁵

The shaping of religious identities of Central Africans can also be observed in voluntary confessions that took place in the church confessional. Of course, written records of these confessions do not exist, but we know that they took place because the confessor sent his parishioners to further confess their sins to the inquisitorial inspector on two occasions at least. In May 1772, freedman Francisco Benguela confessed in Mariana how he had visited an African healer in order to heal his infirmity.²²⁶ Two years later, in June 1774, a slave named Domingos of the Angola “nation”, who was owned by Manoel Carvalho Silva, came to confess his sins as he had been advised to do by his confessor. “As a true Catholic”, Domingos recounted how in his native land he had seen other blacks doing “superstitious things”. When people were sick, the

²²³ Higgins 1999, pp. 96-100.

²²⁴ Paiva 2001, pp. 94-96.

²²⁵ CSM, Livro de registro de testamentos 54, f. 134.

²²⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 129, ff. 143-143v.

souls of the dead entered healers in spirit possession and requested offerings from the living. Domingos told the inspector that he suspected the Devil was speaking inside the healers because when the offerings were made, the sick often recovered. He then said that after arriving in Brazil, Domingos himself had “used some questions to the sick blacks, imagining that the souls of the other blacks would introduce themselves, but never in this land a voice [of a spirit] spoke as happened in his native land”. Domingos also confessed that, on some occasions, he had healed sick people, “conforming to the style of his country”. He promised not to fall into similar temptations again.²²⁷

In effect, the case of Domingos shows a person caught between two religious traditions. Domingos had clearly adopted Catholicism to a great extent. He abided by the sacrament of penance, confessing his sins. This suggests that Domingos attended Mass regularly and had a good conception of what was expected of him as a Catholic. At the same time, Domingos was still relying on religious practices that he had learned at home in Angola, although he was unable to communicate with the ancestral spirits. It is likely that Domingos had already lived in Minas Gerais for a long time. His mental concepts were gradually changing, reflected in the Catholic view that the spirits of the ancestors were really manifestations of the Devil. Although the sincerity of Domingos’ confession and repentance is not doubted, it is important to note that the fear of being denounced to the Inquisition must have been one of the factors that led Domingos’ to take heed of his confessor’s advice. The sacrament of penance guaranteed that he was not excommunicated because of his sins. Despite using African rituals, in the official view Domingos was a Catholic who had sinned, but his sins did not lead to further consequences.

A different path of religious experience is suggested by the case of a slave named Miguel, who was denounced in the parish of Piranga in 1779. Miguel was identified as belonging to the Kasanje “nation”. He was denounced by Captain Antonio Pais de Almeida,²²⁸ who claimed that Miguel was a *feiticeiro* (sorcerer) and had confessed to a pact with the Devil. According to Pais de Almeida’s testimony, Miguel had caused *maleficios* to his former owners and their slaves by bewitching them and other people.²²⁹ Although it was claimed that Miguel had confessed to concluding a pact with the Devil, it is more likely that he was in fact revering powerful ancestral spirits or local deities from Kasanje, which were conceptualized and translated as representatives of the Devil by the Portuguese. Miguel originated in an area in West Central Africa that was still

²²⁷ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 129, ff. 135-135v.

²²⁸ Antonio Pais de Almeida, resident in Barra Longa, was not just a random citizen but one of the significant military officials in Minas Gerais. Interestingly, just as he was making his denunciation in Mariana he received the title “Capitão de Ordenanças de Estado do Brasil” from the Queen Maria I in Lisbon. ANTT, Registo Geral de Mercês do reinado de D. Maria I, livro 81, f. 145.

²²⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 130, ff. 332-332v.

beyond immediate Portuguese control in the second half of eighteenth century, meaning that he did not have any contact with Catholicism prior to his arrival in Luanda. This explains his eagerness to employ witchcraft against his masters.

Syncretistic practices continued to exist among the Atlantic Creole Christians brought from Congo and Angola to Minas Gerais. They were reformulated in the new social environment to fit local understandings, but certain elements of Central African religious life continued to appear in identical form in Minas Gerais. One of these elements was the belief in the potency of Catholic objects in granting wellbeing and protection to those who carried them. Three men were arrested in the 1750s in Serro do Frio for stealing communion wafers from the church. After being detained in Vila do Príncipe for over three years, the accused were taken to Lisbon in 1757 to be questioned by the Inquisition. Two *pardo* brothers, named Salvador and Antonio Carvalho Serra, were accompanied by a Congo slave named Antonio Correia de Aguiar. The trial of the last mentioned individual is interesting because Antonio was the one who actually stole the objects.²³⁰

Antonio's master was a painter named José Correia de Aguiar, who had been commissioned to paint the interior of the main church in the village of Corgo near Vila do Príncipe. Antonio, his master, and two other painters had been working on decorating the interior walls and ceiling for two and a half years. Antonio, who had been enslaved at a "tender age", had been baptized as a child in the kingdom of Kongo. He had obviously learnt his trade from his master, but not yet completely. Antonio never worked on the paintings alone because he did not know how to mix the paints correctly. When Antonio was questioned about his genealogy in June 1759, he said that he was 33 or 34-years-old. He had been confirmed after arriving in Minas Gerais, and throughout his examination showed a good knowledge of the Catholic doctrine.²³¹

Antonio Correia de Aguiar's position throughout his trial was that he had been induced and pressured by Antonio Carvalho Serra to steal the consecrated host from the church. The slave did not give in easily and Antonio Carvalho continued to pester him for three months, reassuring him that similar consecrated objects stolen from churches were carried by many people. The slave's master had a key to the sacristy of the rosary brotherhood that was housed in the main church. Antonio Correia finally gave in to the pleas, fearing that Antonio Carvalho, who besides earning his living as a shoemaker was also a *capitão-do-mato*, would hurt him. He delivered the stolen communion wafers

²³⁰ Souza 1986, pp. 223, 357-362, has studied the case and analyzed the documentation contained in the *processos* of the Serra brothers (ANTT, TSO/IL, Processos 1078 and 4684), however ignoring the *processo* of the Congo slave Antonio Correia de Aguiar (ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270), the third culprit.

²³¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270. The folios were unenumerated when I consulted the documentation in April 2007.

to the house of Antonio Carvalho Serra during a visit by his brother, Salvador. The communion wafers were probably intended to be used as an ingredient in a protective amulet, but according to the narratives of the two brothers, they ended up in Salvador Carvalho Serra's mouth.²³²

The Serra brothers' narrative differed from Antonio Correia's confession. They claimed that the Congo slave had brought the communion wafers to them voluntarily on his own initiative. According to Salvador, his brother Antonio had dismissed the consecrated host and said that he did not want to keep it "because those were things of Negroes". However, as Antonio Correia's testimony also made clear, it was preposterous to claim that he had just accidentally dropped in at Antonio Carvalho Serra's home and left the communion wafers there. The inquisitors were not so credulous, and they banished Salvador for two years to Castro Marim, in the Algarve. His brother Antonio went mad and died in the Inquisition jail. The slave Antonio Correia de Aguiar, who had actually stolen the communion wafers, was also sentenced to two years in Castro Marim.²³³

The claim that the belief in the potency of sacred Catholic objects was a "thing of Negroes" is revealing in that it points to the prevalence of syncretistic practices among Atlantic Creole Christians in Minas Gerais. African slaves were certainly not the only ones who engaged in such practices but similar beliefs were shared by the *mineiro* population at large.²³⁴ What makes the case even more noteworthy is that the Serra brothers' maternal grandmother was a Congo slave named Gracia.²³⁵ Despite being fathered by a white man, who had set their mother free, the Serra brothers testified that a memory of their near ancestors was kept alive. Was it more than a mere coincidence that Antonio Carvalho Serra had chosen a Congo slave to perform the theft? It is possible that the bonds of affection, based on the shared ancestral background, between the two Antonios were closer than they acknowledged in their testimonies.

The Inquisitors initially did not look favorably on an African slave stealing from a church. Antonio constantly had to convince his interrogators that he professed himself a Catholic and understood that the Inquisition suspected him of a serious misdeed. In an interrogation held in November 1758, Antonio argued that "although he is black, he is a faithful Catholic, reared since childhood in the hands of the Church". He made it clear that his parents in the kingdom of Kongo were Catholics and that he had been baptized before being enslaved. In the end, when the verdict was reached in August 1761, he had been

²³² ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270; Souza 1986, pp. 358-359.

²³³ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270; Souza 1986, pp. 328-329, 360.

²³⁴ Souza 1986.

²³⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 4684, f. 26v. Souza 1986, p. 357, claims that both of the maternal grandparents were Congo slaves, but Salvador's genealogy makes it clear that he only knew the name and origin of his grandmother.

able to convince the Inquisitors of Lisbon of his sincerity, which was grounds for the mitigation of his punishment.²³⁶ Like his ancestors in West Central Africa, Antonio was taking part in the formation of Atlantic Creole culture in Minas Gerais. His trial shows that this process was unfolding in similar ways on both sides of the Atlantic.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed religious change in West Central Africa during the era of the Atlantic slave trade, seeking to explain how these processes affected religious identity both in Africa and in Minas Gerais. It could be argued that the southern Atlantic formed a common space of religious interaction. The concept of Atlantic Creole Christianity as used by Heywood and Thornton to describe the processes of religious transformation in the Congo-Angola region can be applied to Brazil as well. In this sense, Central Africans who were transported to Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century did not arrive in a cultural milieu that was completely alien to them.

As has been demonstrated through several cases, individuals could construct their religious identities in various ways. The case of the anonymous Angolan slave on his deathbed cited at the beginning of this chapter shows an individual actively seeking salvation through a Catholic sacrament. At the same time in a neighboring village, a man identified as a Benguela kept revering his ancestral spirits. Most Central Africans, however, took elements from both their ancestral traditions and Catholicism in order to arrive at religious solutions that satisfied them. The resulting syncretism was not often looked upon favorably by European priests and missionaries, but in many cases the clerics also transgressed their obligations. What was most important for the people, however, was that syncretistic ritual practices offered potent protection from temporal threats. As will be discussed in the next chapter, illness was one of the threats that required constant tending by religious specialists in the communities of Africans.

²³⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6270.

6 Herbs, Roots, and *Calundus*: Central African Healing and Divination Practices in Minas Gerais

Central African healers and diviners played an important role in *mineiro* society from the earliest phases of settlement. This is attested to by a denunciation received by the prosecutor of the Inquisition of Lisbon in the early 1720s. A black woman named Gracia was denounced for “making certain dances vulgarly called *calundus*”. The “dance” took place on Saturday evenings, starting at around seven o’clock. It attracted a large crowd of blacks, both men and women, as well as white people. The “dance” was started by two women, followed by another two, and then joined by Gracia, the master of the ceremony. After dancing for a while, Gracia always had “an accident, either real or faked, as if she had lost her senses”. Then the voice of “Dom Felipe” started speaking through her. Some people claimed it was a tender voice while others claimed it was loud. The informers supposed that Dom Felipe was a king of Kongo. People who consulted Gracia paid great respect to Dom Felipe and knelt when asking their questions. They usually wanted to know about “lost or stolen things”. Slave owners came to consult Gracia to find runaway slaves, and some people sought a cure for their illnesses. For example, a white man named Queiros came to seek a cure for his blindness. There seemed to be no limit to Gracia’s power for she was even sought after on the feast day of Saint Bartholomew by a white man named Ignacio da Silva, who chose an African healer instead of Catholic priests in order to alleviate his troubles.¹

Although Gracia’s origin was not mentioned in the denunciation, she most certainly came from West Central Africa. The reference to the king of Kongo is problematic, however, because there was never a king named Dom Felipe in the kingdom of Kongo. Was it Gracia who was saying that Dom Felipe was a king of Kongo or was it an assumption made by the denouncers? It is possible that Gracia identified herself as Congo in Minas Gerais and that white people inferred from this that Dom Felipe was a king of Kongo. Dom

¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 91, ff. 41-41v. Gracia’s place of residence was not revealed in the denunciation, which was dated in the chapel of Rodeio, today known as Conceição do Alemão. Some of Gracia’s customers came from Vila Rica. For example, a white man named Francisco de Frias lived in front of the church of Antonio Dias. Other customers named in the denunciation lived in Rodeio, Ouro Preto, and Lavras Novas. One of the men lived “along the Caminho Novo”. For a geographical definition of Rodeio in the early eighteenth century, see the entry “Conceição do Alemão” in Barbosa 1995, p. 91.

Felipe could have been a leader in one of the independent chiefdoms that still recognized the king of Kongo although the unitary kingdom had disintegrated. It is more likely, however, that Dom Felipe referred to Dom Felipe de Souza or Ngola Hari, who ruled Pungo Andongo in the 1620s and 1630s. In Portuguese, his domain was referred to as the kingdom of Dongo,² which might have been confused with Kongo by the denouncers. It is clear that Gracia had a special relation to Dom Felipe and that he had been an important and highly revered ancestral figure in Gracia's Central African homeland.

Gracia was a religious specialist who served her customers both as a healer and a diviner. Her Central African origin becomes even more evident when the content of an actual ritual, called *calundu* in Minas Gerais and elsewhere in colonial Brazil, is closely studied. The denunciation described Gracia's *calundu* as a dance and also as spirit possession. In order to understand the meaning of this and other similar rituals used by Central Africans in Minas Gerais, this chapter discusses how healing and divination was conceptualized in Angola and Congo in the eighteenth century. Only after examining the background of these religious practices can the full extent of the activities of Central African healers and diviners in Minas Gerais be evaluated.

Daniela Calainho, in her study of African magico-religious practices in early modern Portugal, has classified them into four groups according to the purpose or motivation that the practices were supposed to serve. Magic could be used in healing illness; to divine the whereabouts of people such as runaway slaves and lost things; for protection; and to interfere in personal relations, either with the intention of attracting people with love-magic or of causing misfortune to enemies.³ As Gracia's case makes clear, the activities of individual religious specialists cannot always be divided by using clear-cut classifications. Some of them were both diviners and healers, who helped to find lost things and to restore people to health. In other cases, it was claimed that African religious specialists had both the power to cure illness caused by witchcraft and to cause people illness or other misfortune. This chapter will examine the varied activities of these individuals by concentrating on healing and divination on both sides of the southern Atlantic world.

² Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 307. Pungo Andongo was one of the kingdoms in seventeenth-century Angola that resisted the spread Catholicism, with few people seeking baptism voluntarily and ready to part with their traditional religious devices. Heywood and Thornton 2007a, p. 198.

³ Calainho 2001, pp. 144-145.

6.1 Healing and Divination in Central Africa

6.1.1 The Prevalence of Healing Practices in Angola and Kongo

Healers and diviners were highly rated religious specialists in Central African societies, whose professional status was acquired through individual initiation conducted by older members of the profession. Using the method of historical linguistics, Vansina has shown that ritual/medical specialists have been present in Central African societies since time immemorial. The Njila languages spoken in nearly all of West Central Africa stem from a single ancestral tongue labelled “proto-Njila”. The word denoting these specialists, **-ganga* in proto-Njila, survived in languages spoken in West Central Africa, although religious vocabulary underwent a great many changes as speakers of Njila languages dispersed throughout the region. According to Vansina, male and female diviners, who operated by spirit possession, were “the most spectacular professionals” in Central Africa. They used trance to directly relay the wishes and observations of the spirits who entered into them. Divination by spirit possession gave them an unchallengeable authority in society.⁴

Cadornega, like other European observers of the early modern period, described Central African religious practices as diabolical or as idolatrous, noting that even Africans who were baptized and lived among the Portuguese carried on these practices. Such a depiction reflected the Judeo-Christian tradition in which Cadornega and other Europeans had grown up but did not describe how Africans conceived the world. From an African perspective, ancestral spirits and deities revered in Central Africa had the same powers that the Protestants saw in the Christian God and the Catholics in the saints when they directed their prayers to these spiritual powers. The problems for which people sought spiritual solutions were much the same in Central Africa as in Europe. According to Cadornega, in Angola people sought a spiritual remedy in “their necessities and work and infirmities”. The religious specialists, called *gangas* by the local population, directed people in their religious life and instructed them in sacrificial matters, or “offerings and dishonest feasts” as they were called by the Portuguese. Healers also offered people the herbal remedies that they needed to combat illness and afflictions.⁵

Beyond generalizations, information on the activities of healers and diviners in Angola is sparse but can be gleaned from sporadic denunciations made to the Inquisition. Both Jesuits and Capuchins were responsible for compiling testimonies in the colony of Angola and sending them to Lisbon.

⁴ Vansina 2004, pp. 51, 167-168

⁵ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 255.

The main value of these denunciations is that they often came from Africans rather than Europeans. A batch of denunciations was collected in the Jesuit College in Luanda in 1698 and 1699.⁶ Of the 11 denunciations, seven dealt with healers or diviners. These denunciations clearly followed an edict published by the Inquisition and distributed in Luanda.⁷ Six of the denouncers were slaves. In fact, two of them were slaves of the Jesuit College, while others were owned by individual whites. Two of the denouncers were free blacks, and only three were white. Because of the varied social background of the witnesses, the denunciations offer an illustrative glimpse of the Atlantic Creole society in Luanda and its hinterland at the turn of the eighteenth century.

People who had dealt with religious specialists rarely wanted to admit that they had taken the initiative in seeking help from healers. This was the case with João Ignacio, first of the Jesuits' slaves, who had sought a healer to help his wife Izabel Ignacio, also a slave at the College. João himself was occupied in the College as a *barbeiro*⁸ and *sangrador* or medical officer who drew blood from his patients. At his wife's request, he had called a Mbundu "surgeon" to divine the cause of her illness. The healer made his ceremonies "with his hands" and said that the infirmity was called *casuto*.⁹ He gave Izabel some herbs to cook in a pot filled with water. She then washed herself with the herbal medicine. João Ignacio revealed that the healer-diviner he had called for was a slave named Hieronimo, owned by Captain Manoel Simões Colaço, one of the richest and politically influential merchants in Luanda. João's statement reveals that Central African paradigms of therapeutic practice clearly remained dominant for baptized slaves owned by whites, even by Jesuit priests, in Luanda. The fact that João worked in medical practice as taught to him by Jesuits and still invited a traditional healer to his house shows that he did not fully trust these practices. Furthermore, by adopting the Portuguese term "surgeon" to designate the healer he placed Hieronimo's healing arts on equal standing with European practices.¹⁰

There were slaves who sought help from healers in order to cure their masters. Bernardino Correa da Gama denounced five of his slaves who had hired a Mbundu "surgeon" named Thomé de Angonga from Massangano. Bernardino, however, had driven the healer away because he believed that

⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 31-58, 296-303v. See also Sweet 2003, pp. 193-194.

⁷ Although I have not located this edict, one of the witnesses mentions that he had already witnessed and confessed to seeing some African religious ceremonies "muito antes de se publicar o edital do Sancto Officio" (much before the publication of the edict of the Holy Office). ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, f. 47v.

⁸ *Barbeiro*, although translated as barber, was a slave with rudimentary training in European medical practice, which was often limited to bleeding the patients.

⁹ *Casuto* is mentioned by Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, p. 211, as "an idol" or spirit revered in the kingdom of Matamba.

¹⁰ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 43-45v. See also Ferreira 2006, p. 30.

Africans divined with “diabolic arts”. Bernardino had inherited the five slaves from his father Bernardo Correa. In his denunciation, he did not reveal the origins of his slaves but it reveals another important thing about the healer-diviners’ sphere of operations in Angola. The healer Thomé de Angonga lived in the *presídio* of Massangano, not in the vicinity of Luanda. It shows that Central African religious specialists did not operate simply in their home villages but also traveled to serve their clients in different locations, perhaps enjoying considerable fame and notoriety in so doing.¹¹

In similar vein, the slaves of the widow Antonia de Sá sought to cure a child of their master. They were betrayed by a slave named Domingas de Duarte, who related how she and other female slaves named Izabel, Mariana and Maria had sought out a healer. Izabel was nursing her master’s daughter and called a “*feiticeiro* of the *sertão*” or a “sorcerer from the backlands” to divine the cause of the illness from which the child suffered. The healer asked for a twined basket and maize flour and began a divination ceremony, speaking out words that Domingas did not understand. The diviner made the basket move in circles and after the ceremony, gave herbal medicine to apply as a cure for the child. Again, the healer in question did not live in Luanda but came from the *sertão* to give his services. Apparently, the slaves considered African therapeutic practices more potent than those brought to Luanda by the Portuguese.¹²

Only one of the witnesses came to confess to having actually used the services of a healer to cure his own discomfort. Alexandre, a free black fisherman from Luanda, told how he had been on a business trip in Libolo, which he called “heathen lands”. He had hurt his leg and was in great pain when he decided to call for a local healer. The healer told Alexandre that he could not treat him before divining the cause of the illness, which he commenced to do by making his ceremonies “with a pan”. The healer told Alexandre that his illness was “inherited from his parents” and was called *migunga* in the language of the healer. However, the medicine did not have the desired effect because the pain in the leg continued to bother Alexandre. The healer was named Domingos and he was from Ambaca, although Alexandre did not know from which village he came. Again, this was a healer who traveled around Angola. Alexandre also described how he had met people who sacrificed a young goat to venerate their dead so that they could have rain, and to free themselves from poisonous insects. He had apparently taken part in this ceremony, for he confessed to eating the meat they had offered. He also testified to seeing a spirit possession ceremony. A woman with a “malign spirit” in her body had started to divine but Alexandre did not discuss the purpose of this ceremony further.¹³

¹¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 31-32v.

¹² ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 298-298v.

¹³ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 55-57v.

Alexandre, like other Central Africans who had confessed to seeking help from healers and their participation in rituals conducted by these specialists, faced a dilemma. They were all baptized Catholics and had to convince the priests that they had never made a pact with the Devil or parted from the Catholic faith. They confessed voluntarily and were admonished by the priests. Their acceptance of Catholicism did not hinder them from engaging in traditional religious practices. Alexandre justified this by saying that he had been in “heathen lands” when the pains had started. He did not have the option to seek any help other than from an African healer.

Other slaves also confessed to being present at healing ceremonies. This was the case of Gregorio de Pascoal, slave of a priest named João Rodrigues da Rocha. He confessed how a neighbor named Victoria, slave of Sergeant-Major Ignacio Matozo de Andrade, had called him to participate in the sacrifice of a goat, in service and veneration of a dead ancestor. Gregorio called the diviners in charge of the ceremony “Mbundu surgeons, who divine the cause of illness and other things”. He named Victoria as a “surgeon” and a “master in divination” who was consulted by many people seeking a cure for their illnesses. More than 30 people had watched the sacrifice of the goat, three of them also belonging to the same priest as Gregorio. All of them had eaten the sacrificed goat.¹⁴

A similar ritual had taken place in one of the Jesuit estates in the district of Bengo. This was relayed by Matheos Sebastião, another slave of the College. He had seen how a free black healer named Paulo Cambundo, resident in Bengo, and his diviner comrades who lived in “distant lands”, had killed many chicken and a goat. They also had a pot placed over a fire. In the pot, Matheos observed blood, wild honey, red feathers, and bones of animals. Three men danced around the fire, accompanied by musicians playing *maconzas*.¹⁵ The purpose of the ceremony was to cure a sick black woman. Paulo, the master of the ceremony, invoked a spirit named Angola,¹⁶ clearly a reference to the title *ngola*. In effect, Paulo was thus invoking a former ruler’s ancestral spirit, much like Gracia in Minas Gerais some 20 years later was to be possessed by “Dom Felipe” or Ngola Hari.

Matheos gave such a detailed description of the ritual that he had clearly witnessed it first-hand and from close range. Evidently shaken by his experience, Matheos swore that he would never again go to such a feast, knowing now that it was a “diabolic thing”. He explained that his only fault or sin had been his curiosity. After seeing it, he had made the sign of the cross and

¹⁴ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 35-37.

¹⁵ An instrument known as *güiro* in Latin America except in Brazil, where it is called *reco-reco*.

¹⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 52-53.

disapproved of similar rituals. At least in front of his interrogators, Matheos was showing a genuine conversion to Catholicism.¹⁷

6.1.2 Explanations and Cures of Illness

In West Central Africa, sickness was attributed to spiritual forces. The most common explanation for sickness was that it was caused by unsatisfied ancestors, who had not been revered properly. In Kimbundu, these were called by the name *zumbi*. According to Cadornega, sick people commonly expressed their malady by saying that a *zumbi* had entered them or infected them. People were often very cautious of all signs referring to *zumbi*, for example to the appearance of their ancestors or any other dead people in their dreams. If the dead appeared in dreams, it was taken as a sign that they had come to fetch the person into the Other World. To avert this, a sacrificial offering was made at the grave of the ancestor.¹⁸ In the denunciations to the Inquisition from Angola, it was often said that people suffered from *zumbi*. A number of cases from the 1710s and 1720s concerned people who the healers had “diagnosed” with *zumbi*.

In Massangano in 1719, eight soldiers were sent on an errand by the captain-major of the *presidio*. On the estate owned by Dona Catherina Correa, the soldiers heard noise generated by a large gathering of people. They encircled the place and saw that the people were “invoking the demon”. When they were detected, most of the participants managed to run away, including the “master” in charge of the ceremony. The soldiers arrested a free black woman named Domingas de João and a slave named José Correa, who belonged to the owner of the estate. For the purposes of the ritual, Domingas was greased and covered with flour. She told the soldiers that the ritual was arranged to cure her son, who had been caught by a *zumbi*. The soldiers found a bag of medicine left by the healer. They also saw that there was an abundance of food and drink prepared for the ritual.¹⁹

It is noteworthy that the soldiers called the place where they made the arrest a “place of Calundo”. It is unclear from the denunciation whether they were referring to a location of this name or whether they were referring to the ritual as *calundo*. In colonial Brazil, *calundu* was a generic term for African rituals and it seems to have been used in Angola as well during the eighteenth century to denote spirit possession ceremonies.²⁰ Another important feature in this denunciation is that Domingas was covered with flour. In Central Africa,

¹⁷ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 72, ff. 52-53.

¹⁸ Cadornega 1940, vol. I, p. 370 and Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 262.

¹⁹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 94, ff. 375-387.

²⁰ Kananoja 2010, pp. 460-461.

it was thought that in the Other World, spirits were colored white. Although the ritual was led by a healer, the “master” who managed to run away, it seems that Domingas had an equally important role in it. Both she and José Correa, who seems to have been a mere onlooker present at the ceremony, were sent to a prison in Luanda. The jailer was baffled by his new prisoners, writing to the Inquisition and wanting to know what he was supposed to do with the two and “so many other blacks, who have been arrested during recent years for the same reason”.²¹

After returning to Lisbon, the Capuchin missionary Frei Joseph de Modena gave his deposition of this case to the Inquisition in 1721. When asked to explain a *zumbi* by the Inquisitors, he answered that it was a sickness caused by “a soul of one of the ancestors” of the sick person or at least that is what the healers told their patients in order to extract payment in kind from them. The patients offered a banquet to appease the *zumbi* but in Modena’s view the only purpose of the ritual was to invoke the demon. However, Modena noted that without the remedies applied by the healers, the patients often died. After all, as he said, the sickness “came naturally”, so it could apparently be cured with natural medicine.²²

Similar beliefs regarding *zumbi* prevailed in Benguela, where a black soldier named Antonio de Freitas sought a cure for a hernia, which had bothered him for several years. In 1720, a healer from Dombe suggested that Freitas, who had already sought a variety of remedies in Benguela, heal himself by using local methods. The healer convinced Freitas that his hernia was caused by the *zumbi* of his deceased wife. In order to appease her spirit, Freitas organized a ceremony in his house with drummers and dancers. Along with his slaves and children, numerous people participated in the ritual. Freitas sacrificed a calf that was eaten by the participants. The priest in charge of the investigation noted in his conclusion that in all the *sertões* of Angola, both baptized and non-Christian blacks healed their infirmities with “superstition and heathen rites”, a practice that missionaries preaching in the *sertão* could not eradicate.²³

In Portuguese parlance, African medical specialists were usually called *feiticeiros* or *magicos*, the local term in the languages of the area being *nganga*.²⁴ They were not authoritative clergymen, but rather religious specialists whose primary role was to communicate with the Other World. As mediums

²¹ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 94, ff. 387.

²² ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 94, ff. 371-373.

²³ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 92, ff. 235-285.

²⁴ On the various significances of the term *nganga*, see Pantoja, 2004, p. 127. In Kikongo, *nganga* is derived from a root that means “knowledge” or “skill”, specifically skill in religious matters. Catholic priests, although receiving their titles through study and training, were called *ngangas* in Kongo, as were many people who had demonstrated the ability to contact the Other World. See Thornton, 1998b, p. 53-54.

to the Other World, they determined which spirits were plaguing the body of an individual, and then prescribed a remedy or a variety of remedies. Their practices were sufficiently uniform to permit European observers to offer some general depictions of their practice.

According to Cavazzi, people in Angola turned to a specialist called *nganga-ia-zumbi* or the “priest of the spirits” in case of sickness. The missionary explained that sometimes the *nganga-ia-zumbi*, with some disciples, locked themselves in the house of the patient. Then the *nganga* proceeded to ask the spirit why it was bothering the patient, and one of the disciples would answer in a crying voice, as if possessed by the spirit, that it was because the spirit wanted needs of one kind or another to be fulfilled. However, more commonly the *nganga* called another specialist, *xinguila*, who was then possessed by the spirit in a ritual where musicians played their instruments and helped the healer enter into a trance. The *xinguila*, after remaining motionless for a moment, started to move violently, turned his eyes, lay on the ground, contorted furiously, and tensed all body parts. The spirit of the deceased then started to speak through the possessed healer with metaphors, denouncing disgraces, predicting adversities, criticizing the avarice of the relatives, and asking for a sacrifice. It answered the questions of the relatives and gave them a chance to hear the words of those of the Other World. It was usual that the patient and his relatives had to fulfill further ceremonies and duties to appease the ancestors.²⁵

A detailed description of a *xinguila*'s ritual practice in the interior of Angola was contained in Catarina Juliana's confession that she gave to the Inquisition of Lisbon in 1758. Catarina related how, in the mid-1740s while living in Ambaca, she had suffered from a swelling and had gone to visit a free black named Matheus Capichi. Matheus directed Catarina to the house of Esperança, who was a *xinguila* by profession. Esperança told Catarina that her sickness was caused by two spirits, Kibuku and Muta. The healer called on people to gather in her house and they started a spirit possession ceremony. Esperança, entranced, performed a dance Catarina called the *calandúz*, and called on the spirits Kibuku and Muta. After the dance, she killed a chicken and mixed its blood with some herbal powders. She applied this potion to Catarina's body, who did not immediately experience any improvement in her condition. The treatment was continued, however, and Esperança made four visits to Catarina's home, bringing her herbal medicine, which she mixed with castor oil and applied on Catarina. As payment for her services, the *xinguila* received

²⁵ Cavazzi 1965, vol. I, pp. 203-205. Cavazzi noted that any man or woman could become a *xinguila*, but usually spirit possession was manifested in “important persons”. In Kongo, Luca da Caltanissetta described a similar spirit medium, called *nganga ngombo*. Caltanissetta 1970, p. 103.

almost eight meters of linen cloth, bottles of *aguardente* and pieces of pork meat, all meant to appease the hostile spirits.²⁶

Confirming Catarina's story, another witness in the case, questioned in Luanda in 1761, described a spirit possession ritual that bore a clear similarity with Cavazzi's description almost a 100 years earlier:

“*Xinguilar* is to make a gathering in which they play instruments called *emgomias* which are drums, and other instruments called *macanzo* which is a piece of wood with grooves that is played with a stick, making noise, and to the sound of this noise one dances, and by making gestures and motions disturbed like a drunk says that [he/she] has the Devil in the head, and the rest adore this, and consult this about what they need to know, asking what caused someone's death, or what is causing a sickness, if [someone, i.e., a slave] is absent or run away, if [someone] is alive or dead.”²⁷

It was thought that the power of the *ngangas* originated in *kindoki*, which was the gift of being able to operate with the assistance of the Other World. As Thornton has shown, the *ngangas* in Kongo could be diviners who read the patterns made by throwing stones or they could interpret dreams, either their own or others'. They might also see visions or hear voices or even, as in the case of *xinguilas*, be possessed by beings from the Other World, going into a trance through various forms of hypnosis induced by drumming, dancing or rhythmic chanting, and hand clapping. The *ngangas* typically helped people with problems that could have their origins in the Other World, sometimes suggesting that the client had offended the ancestors or broken some taboo established by *nkita*, a guardian deity of the land. However, they could also name another person or people who were working bad *kindoki*, in the form of *lokas*, or curses on them because of jealousy or anger. This could be done either intentionally or unintentionally by people who harbored negative feelings.²⁸ If it was intentional, it was done by people called witches, *ndoki* in Kikongo and *muloji* in Kimbundu, selfish and greedy people who enlisted otherworldly power and caused disease or induced misfortune. The power to carry out a *loka* was *kindoki* as well and, in these cases, it was used negatively for selfish purposes.²⁹ Thus, in West Central Africa, people did not believe that evil arose from some external source, such as a devil or evil spirits, but rather from the intentions and actions of people.³⁰

²⁶ Kananoja 2010, p. 460.

²⁷ Kananoja 2010, p. 462.

²⁸ Thornton, 1998b, pp. 54-55. On witchcraft from ethnographic perspective, see MacGaffey, 1986, p. 161, who states that “BaKongo themselves attribute witchcraft to conscious or unconscious jealousy”.

²⁹ Thornton 1998b, p. 42.

³⁰ Thornton 2007, p. 96.

Alleged witches were rarely denounced to the Inquisition in Angola because their conviction and punishment lay within the jurisdiction of *sobas* or village chiefs. In 1717 in the *presídio* of Ambaca an African soldier named Antonio Alveres Cabengue came to denounce a witch to the Capuchin Father Joseph de Modena. Cabengue's denunciation was directed at his own father João Alveres Cabengue. Antonio accused his father of killing his brother Francisco, and of trying to kill a soldier named Manoel Rodrigues de Medeiros. After his brother's death, Antonio had fled from his father and severed all communication with him. According to Medeiros, João Cabengue had given him a local fruit called *perna de colla*³¹ that was poisoned. Without an antidote, Medeiros certainly would have died. The witch had also tried to poison Medeiros' sister who was similarly saved by an antidote. According to the third witness Bento Lopes de Carvalho, João Alveres Cabengue was an outcast who had been banished from his home village and was despised by people in Ambaca. On one occasion, the elder Cabengue was forced to save a poisoned soldier by administering an antidote for he feared that the captain-major of Ambaca would punish him if the soldier died.³²

Central African religious specialists were experts in determining which spirits were plaguing the body, and appeasing ancestral spirits with feasts. They treated illness with natural medicines.³³ As the accusations against João Alveres Cabengue show, healers had to know a variety of antidotes in order to counteract the effects of poisonous plants. The selection of medicinal plants in Angola was extensive. The Europeans who wrote about local medicine in Angola in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries listed over 120 different natural ingredients that could be used in different treatments. The great majority of medicine came from plants, with only 20 derived from animals and four from mineral sources.³⁴ The principal illnesses for which these remedies were used in healing were fevers, as was noted by early European visitors to the region.³⁵ Other common complaints included genital-urinary infections, venereal diseases, and gastro-intestinal disorders. Other pharmaceutical uses of Central African medicine included the treatment of skin diseases, and their use as antidotes.³⁶

Portuguese observers quickly familiarized themselves with African medical practices. Lopes reported in the late sixteenth century that, in the kingdom of Kongo, natural medicine comprised various herbs, trees and their bark, oils, waters and minerals. Fever was treated with a powder prepared from

³¹ See Cadornega 1942, vol. 3, p. 202.

³² ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, no. 91, ff. 43-49v.

³³ Sweet 2003, 105.

³⁴ Dias 1995.

³⁵ Pigafetta and Lopes 1989, p. 96 [p. 69 in original pagination].

³⁶ Dias 1995.

two trees that was mixed with palm oil and applied onto the body from head to toes. The cure for headaches was achieved by making cuts on the temples with small horns and then sucking through the horns so that they filled with blood. Cupping horns were used similarly on any ailing body part. Lopes saw how wounds were effectively disinfected with herbs. He concluded that people did not need doctors, surgeons, and physicians or European medicine and mixtures, for they simply cured themselves with native plants.³⁷ Almost a century later, Cadornega observed that herbal remedies were often mixed with water in a pan and then people washed with this water. After repeating this a couple of times, the water was thrown onto a crossing of two roads. The belief was that the first person who walked over the remains of the water took the disease away with him or her. People coming to a crossroads were careful to not walk over these remains and sought to bypass them as best they could.³⁸

There are indications that some white people in Angola openly believed in African healing practices although these cases are problematic because sometimes these denunciations were motivated by ill-will and jealousy.³⁹ Lieutenant Pasqual Rodrigues de Queiroga was denounced in 1716 for consulting African healers in order to heal his godfather João de Moura da Silva in Massangano. Queiroga hailed from the Algarve but was then living in Luanda. According to the testimonies, he had called a black diviner to his house, who had told him that the illness was caused by the *zumbi* of Silva's children's wet-nurse. According to the denunciations, the diviner used the *bolungo* ritual that, as discussed in the previous chapter, was used to locate witches. The diviner thus seemed to indicate that the wet nurse was behind Silva's illness. Queiroga had received a number of remedies from the diviner but when he tried to persuade Silva to take them, the patient responded by chasing Queiroga out of the house. Besides believing in the advice of local healers, Queiroga was said to wash himself only with water mixed with herbs that he conserved in a pot in his house. He was also rumored to carry gazelle horns, filled with poison, as amulets.⁴⁰

There is nothing curious or surprising in Portuguese men believing in African magical practices. After all, similar practices were used in Portugal at the same time. The idea that illness could be caused and cured by supernatural and physical means was common to Portuguese and African world views. José Pedro Paiva has shown that popular healers in Portugal, especially in the region of Minho in the north of the country, often engaged in spirit possession rituals. The contents of these rituals were more or less equal to the ones described in

³⁷ Pigafetta and Lopes 1989, pp. 96-96 [p. 96 in original pagination]

³⁸ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 258.

³⁹ Kananoja 2010.

⁴⁰ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor 86, ff. 41-45v.

Angola. When it was thought that a spirit of a dead person was causing the illness, the healers moved violently and entered into a trance. In this state, the spirit that possessed them “talked” and revealed the proceedings that were to be adopted to heal the illness. It was common that the spirit demanded a sacrifice from the patient. People usually offered bread, cheese, and wine. Rather than seeing ritual offerings as a pagan practice, Paiva has pointed out that contacting the dead fitted perfectly into the Catholic model of asking for help from the souls of the dead in Mass and through prayers. The only doctrinal problem with spirit possession ceremonies was that, from the ecclesiastical point of view, it was not possible that the dead came to this world to talk to the living.⁴¹

Therapeutic practices in Portugal were also based on the local empiric knowledge of the virtues of certain herbs and plants. This ancestral knowledge was often transmitted orally and secretly from generation to generation. The application of natural medicine was normally spiced up with more or less orthodox Catholic prayers. Healers routinely requested the help of divine or saintly powers throughout the country. Cooking herbs and water and then giving the mixture to the patient to drink was a part of the healers’ repertoire, as was applying concoctions of herbs to the parts of the body that were ailing.⁴² In practical and symbolic terms, there was thus little that would have separated the Central African and Portuguese popular healers.

6.1.3 Portuguese Alternatives to African Healing Practices

Seeking help from African healers and diviners is more understandable when looking at other options of getting medical assistance in Angola. Even in Luanda, these options were extremely limited. In addition to the Jesuit College, which according to Cadornega served mainly dying patients, there was the hospital of *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* (Holy House of Mercy). This was the main hospital in Luanda, established perhaps as soon as the Portuguese founded Luanda in 1576.⁴³ In the late seventeenth century, it received from 400 to 600 patients annually. Cadornega estimated that this was a low figure taking into account the prevalence of the “calamity of the land”. The hospital was especially crowded during the rainy season in May. The hospital of the *Misericórdia* paid the salaries of a doctor and a surgeon, and there were nurses and slaves of the

⁴¹ Paiva 1997, pp. 106-107.

⁴² Paiva 1997, pp. 108-109.

⁴³ According to Cadornega 1940, vol. I, p. 118, the *Misericórdia* of Luanda was established during the governorship of D. Frei Simão Mascarenhas (1621-1624), but this is disputed by Brásio 1959, pp. 107-109, who has argued that the *Misericórdia* was established by Paulo Dias de Novais and the Jesuit Father Garcia Simões in 1576. According to Brásio, the hospital was definitely in existence by 1616.

hospital to assist in the care of the sick. There was also a white *barbeiro* and a black slave *barbeiro* to substitute for him. Cadornega mentioned that mercury was given to many of the patients, and there was also a reserve of “necessary” medicine.⁴⁴

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Misericórdia* of Luanda struggled with its financial administration. The salaries of the staff had to be paid, the prices of medicine were high, and the hospital constantly needed to replenish its supplies of linen and utensils. The hospital began to be seen first and foremost as a military hospital that served soldiers rather than the wider populace. But in the mid-eighteenth century, even soldiers were evading being treated in the hospital. According to the Governor D. António Almeida Soares Portugal e Alarcão, Count of Lavradio, who governed between 1749 and 1753, soldiers were saying that they would not go the hospital because there was no medicine and they would die of hunger. Count of Lavradio was able to reform the hospital at least temporarily, and soldiers returned there to be cured. However, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it seems to have fallen into decline once again.⁴⁵

Outside of Luanda, a house of the *Misericórdia* was also maintained in Massangano. It served all kinds of people but mainly the poor, soldiers of the infantry stationed in the garrison, as well as travelers. Tropical illnesses were the most common complaint among the patients. Patients received medication and necessities from the hospital. Cadornega did not specify how many people went to the hospital annually, noting only that the infirmary had a “sufficient” number of beds.⁴⁶ The establishment of the *Misericórdia* in Massangano in 1660 was fraught with conflict. The Luanda *Misericórdia* argued that the soldiers of Massangano could easily be treated in the hospital in Luanda, whereas Massangano residents maintained that they needed their own hospital to serve the needs of the poor and the soldiers because Luanda was 40 leagues distant. After more than a decade of dispute, the Massangano *Misericórdia* obtained royal approval in 1676.⁴⁷

Portuguese knowledge of tropical illnesses was fairly quick to emerge. Aleixo de Abreu, who served as a physician in Angola between 1594 and 1603 wrote a comprehensive account of tropical medicine. In Luanda, he had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with several tropical diseases suffered by the local population. His book gave full and accurate descriptions of amoebic hepatitis, yellow fever, scurvy, dracontiasis, trichuriasis, and tungiasis, and reported on malaria and typhoid fever. Abreu worked in the hospital in Luanda

⁴⁴ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Brásio 1959, pp. 113-127.

⁴⁶ Cadornega 1942, vol. III, pp. 121-122.

⁴⁷ Brásio 1959, pp. 134-144.

with two Spanish surgeons. Besides treating illnesses, Abreu and his Spanish colleagues carried out post-mortem examinations that led to precise descriptions of scurvy, a very common disease among slaves and sailors alike. Throughout the era of the slave trade, scurvy was known as “*mal de Loanda*” or the “Luanda disease”. It resulted from the progressive depletion of ascorbic acid after a diet of preserved victuals eaten during long periods at sea. A considerable part of Abreu’s work concentrated on the doctrines and practice of phlebotomy or bleeding. This was the major treatment recommended for some of the ailments. In this context, Abreu also mentioned the value and usage of leeches, and wet and dry cupping. For the treatment of scurvy, Abreu recommended the use of fresh milk in the diet and several syrups with plenty of vegetable ingredients. The most powerful preparation he prescribed in most of his recipes was rose syrup, one of the richest natural sources of ascorbic acid.⁴⁸

Official Portuguese medical practice in the sixteenth century was still dominated by the views of Galen and Hippocrates. Treating illness was based on humoral theory, which held that illness resulted from an imbalance in the humors or fluids that could be redressed through diet, medicines, purging, vomiting and bleeding. This view was replaced by new medical inventions during the Enlightenment. In the early eighteenth century, Portuguese physicians began to look for texts that would convey more effective medical techniques than could be learned from the ancient texts. Instrumental in this process were expatriate Portuguese doctors who corresponded actively with their countrymen and sought to reform medical practice in their native country.⁴⁹

In practical terms, much of the conventional medicine available in Angola must have been seen as ineffective and even counterproductive. Phlebotomy rarely resulted in the recovery of the patient but rather led to deterioration in health.⁵⁰ As we have seen, bleeding was used by Africans as well, although it seems not to have been as severe. The use of cupping horns in Kongo is one indication that there was some overlap in the African and Portuguese medical traditions. It is thus not surprising that medical knowledge in Angola was quick to become creolized as the Portuguese learned the uses of local natural medicine from Central Africans. There was a great need for this knowledge among Europeans because the number of qualified doctors

⁴⁸ Guerra 1968. It is questionable, however, to what extent Abreu’s findings were disseminated among other students of tropical medicine in Angola or even in Portugal. As Guerra describes, Abreu’s book was printed at the author’s expense, and its circulation was allowed only in Portugal. Its print run probably did not exceed 200 copies. Moreover, the book was written in Spanish and Latin, giving it little chance of survival after Portugal seceded from Spain in 1640. Hence, the treatise is extremely rare and only six recorded copies exist.

⁴⁹ This process is documented in Walker 2005, Chapter 3, Enlightenment Influences: The Movement toward Medical Reform in Eighteenth-Century Portugal.

⁵⁰ On the practice of phlebotomy in early modern Portugal, see Santos 2005.

and the stock of European medicine in Angola were always low.⁵¹ Moreover, consequences of humoral medicine must have led many people to conclude that the herbal remedies used by African healers inflicted less harm.

Cadornega noted that the peoples of Angola used a wide variety of herbs that they applied when they suffered infirmities. However, Cadornega criticized the use of natural medicine among Africans because there was little understanding of the qualities of the herbs. This criticism was clearly based on the Galenic tradition of distinguishing between hot and cold qualities of matter. Cadornega also noted that the doses of medicine were not well regulated, so that it seemed unclear how much of a certain medicine should be taken or applied as a remedy for a sickness.⁵²

The creolized nature of therapeutic practices in Angola is best revealed by correspondence concerning the hospital of Massangano. In 1702, the Capuchin missionary António Maria de Florença wrote to the king, complaining about the lack of medicine, and the absence of a doctor and a surgeon in the *Misericórdia* hospital. His letter was brought to the attention of Angola's former governor, Luís César de Meneses, who commented on medical practices in Massangano. According to him, soldiers from the *presídios* of Muxima, Cambambe, Pedras, and Ambaca came to be treated in Massangano. They were treated with "*remédios da terra*" or local natural medicine by local specialists, who knew which herbs to use because of their long experience with various illnesses. Following the former governor's advice, the Overseas Council in Lisbon told Father António Maria that the soldiers in Massangano were best cured with local medicine, "because experience shows that it is the best way to free them from danger than if they were cured with [European medical] arts". Moreover, the council reminded the Capuchins that it would be impossible to send surgeons and doctors to Massangano voluntarily because of the hostile disease environment in the interior of Angola.⁵³ The Overseas Council thus gave its unwitting approval for the use of African medical practices in the interior of Angola.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Portuguese began to take a more systematic interest in the medicinal plants of Angola. In the 1780s, a mission of naturalists led by Angelo Donati was sent to Angola to collect plant specimens, but due to Donati's death the mission was never completed. However, a member of the mission named Álvaro de Carvalho Matozo sent a box of collected specimens as well as a report of some remedies used in traditional Angolan medicine. The 14-page report listed over a dozen medicinal plants that were used in treating illnesses varying from gonorrhoea to diarrhoea,

⁵¹ Dias 1995.

⁵² Cadornega 1942, vol. III, p. 318.

⁵³ Brásio 1959, pp. 144-146.

fever, and digestive disorders.⁵⁴ Matozo's report shows that there was a genuine interest among the Portuguese to learn the potential of natural medicine from Central African healers. In the natural-historical research, Angolan medicinal plants were strictly separated from the ritual context in which they were usually employed, and thus Matozo's report includes no mention of ceremonies that often accompanied the administration of medicine by healers to patients.

New ideas on medical care started to spread to Angola in the second half of the eighteenth century. Francisco Damião Cosme, who served as the *físico mor* or chief physician during the governorship of Sousa Coutinho (1764-1772), wrote a treatise on the most prevalent diseases in the colony. Enlightenment influences were clear in his text. The treatise, which was intended as a guide especially for the men who went inland to the *sertão*, emphasized preventive measures. According to Cosme, it was easier to prevent illness than to cure it. He guided his countrymen to eat healthy food, avoiding meat and fish that had gone bad. Alcohol in moderate amounts was recommended to purify the body. Cosme included wines from Porto but also *aguardente* among the preferred beverages.⁵⁵ He outlined ways to purify drinking water collected from rivers, lakes and fountains, which were especially important for people who went into the *sertão*. Other preventive measures that all citizens should utilize included exercise; cleanliness of the body, clothes, houses, and streets; and avoidance of extreme emotions, especially melancholy. Cosme also recommended the use of incense to perfume the insides of houses. According to him, many local trees were suitable for these purposes.⁵⁶

The major part of Cosme's treatise was devoted to describing various illnesses and their cures. Almost half of the work was devoted to malarial fevers. The practice of phlebotomy was duly criticized and Cosme insisted that doctors in Angola should stop the practice of bleeding their patients. Instead, he was in favor of using emetics in the early stages of an illness. The use of cinchona was gradually becoming accepted in Angola. Besides naming cinchona as medicine, Cosme mentioned that, to combat malaria, some people took a solution called *Águas da Inglaterra* or "waters of England", a patent medicine produced from cinchona bark, which he criticized as more harmful than effective.⁵⁷ There were some hints in the treatise that Cosme was familiar with the array of medicinal plants used by popular healers in Angola. For example, in his discussion of indigestion, headaches and flatulence, he did mention that the powder of the *nkasa* tree was used in the *sertão* as an emetic. He also noted that removing

⁵⁴ Pina 1938, pp. 15-25.

⁵⁵ See Curto 2004 on the imports of alcohol to Luanda and its other uses in Angola.

⁵⁶ Cosme 1967, pp. 178-185.

⁵⁷ Cosme 1967, pp. 192-198. *Águas da Inglaterra*, a quinine solution developed by an expatriate Portuguese physician Fernando Mendes in the 1680s, was exported to Portugal as a treatment for malaria. See Walker 2005, pp. 114, 120.

blood by making small cuts in the skin was often used on delirious malaria patients having convulsions. In the interior of Angola, the common practice was to remove blood through the nose.⁵⁸

The last part of Cosme's work was devoted to slave merchants. Cosme gave very simple advice on how to advance the well-being of slaves that were to be taken across the Atlantic. Although his personal motive might have been a genuine compassion towards suffering humans, Cosme clearly directed his words to the slave traders with the message that his advice would help them to increase their profits. As such, Cosme's advice differed little from what he recommended as preventive measures generally. To ensure the well-being of slaves during the Middle Passage, they were to be well-fed, given a chance to play and dance to the sound of their traditional instruments such as *batuques* and marimbas, and by maintaining good hygienic conditions among the slaves. Cosme warned traders of excessive punishment and suggested that special care should be taken of slaves who suffered from melancholy.⁵⁹

The attempts to systematize and disseminate new knowledge on tropical medicine that was starting to accumulate in the eighteenth century were manifested in Angola in the 1790s, when two celebrated medical doctors were consecutively the chief physicians of Angola. The Brazilian-born doctor José Pinto Azeredo, who had studied in Edinburgh and Leiden and was a member of the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh, was responsible for organizing and opening a medical school in Luanda in 1791.⁶⁰ After returning to Lisbon, Azeredo published, in 1799, essays on the treatment of malaria, dysentery, and tetanus based on his experiences in Luanda. As was the case with Cosme some decades earlier, Azeredo criticized the "abuses" of bleeding and claimed that this practice was not used in official medical facilities in Luanda anymore. However, he noted that making skin cuts was still used throughout Angola and undertaken by the patients themselves to alleviate whatever illnesses from which they were suffering. Although Azeredo was in favor of making cuts in patients' necks when they suffered headaches during malarial attacks, in general he judged that cuts often aggravated illnesses that were otherwise benign.⁶¹ In another passage in his book, Azeredo clearly condemned the traditional popular healing practices in Angola:

⁵⁸ Cosme 1967, p. 187. A similar practice was employed in the British West Indies, where slave doctors removed blood from the noses of their patients to relieve them of headaches and colds. See Sheridan 1985, p. 81.

⁵⁹ Cosme 1967, pp. 261-268.

⁶⁰ On Azeredo's formal training and his stay in Luanda, see Pinto et al., 2005, pp. 620-632. On the medical school of Luanda, see Esaguy 1951.

⁶¹ Azeredo 1799, pp. 79-80.

“The black folk, even while living with whites and learning their customs, observing their religion, and speaking their language, never forget the heathen rites, mischief and superstitions. In their illness they do not want professors nor take pharmaceutical remedies; because they only have faith in their medicines that they call *milongos*, and these have to be administered by *feiticeiros* [sorcerers], or *curadores* [popular healers]. It is lamentable that many whites born in Angola, but even some Europeans, believe in the virtue of such remedies, and secretly subject themselves to similar doctors.”⁶²

Azeredo’s work thus shows that the feeble efforts, whether by the Inquisition or secular authorities, to rid the Portuguese colony of Angola of traditional therapeutic practices during the eighteenth century had not borne any fruit. As a manifestation of the Atlantic Creole culture in Angola, many white people found it more convenient to trust African popular healers rather than the surgeons and bleeders that were employed in the hospital of Luanda. In this way, people showed their distrust of the practice of phlebotomy that had dominated much of official medical thinking in Angola and elsewhere in the tropics. At the same time, however, the practice of making skin cuts and drawing blood in tiny quantities from sick people seems to have been an acceptable practice to both Africans and at least some Europeans.

Following Azeredo, José Maria Bomtempo was nominated the chief physician of the colony in 1799. Besides being responsible for treating the military corps and the sick in the hospital of Luanda, Bomtempo was charged with the management of the medical school in the city. During his stay in Luanda, Bomtempo had a perfect opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge of Angolan illnesses, especially the fevers that ravaged the Portuguese, and of their treatment. Bomtempo would use this knowledge when he was transferred to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, where he served until 1821 as a commissioner of the *Junta do Protomedicato*, an organ responsible for granting official licenses to practitioners of medicine. In a proposal written by Bomtempo to the *Junta*, he observed that Brazil was a country where nature generally offered many plants with medical virtues. He then defended the knowledge of popular healers or *curandeiros* who used their detailed knowledge of medicinal plants in healing illness, saying that where there was a lack of educated doctors, the *curandeiros* should be allowed to function without interference. Bomtempo was certainly familiar with the creolized nature of therapeutic practices in Angola and believed that the *curandeiros* had an important role to play in the treatment of illnesses in Brazil.⁶³

⁶² Azeredo 1799, p. 53.

⁶³ Rodrigues 2005, pp. 252-253.

While in Angola, Bomtempo also tried to introduce inoculation against smallpox among the local population but met with little success. At least among the African population, resistance to letting a white doctor do such an operation was great. He tried to get volunteers to submit to vaccination but only seems to have been able to vaccinate children suffering from smallpox, and although the treatment was successful, the families of the children responded with resentment. It is possible that Central Africans practiced something resembling variolation on ritual occasions and were perhaps resisting the fact that it was a white doctor who was treating them rather than the methods Bomtempo was using.⁶⁴

6.2 Central African Healing Arts in Colonial Minas Gerais

In his classic study of African religions in Brazil, the French sociologist Roger Bastide argued that the slave trade disrupted African civilizations to the degree that African society could never be reborn in Brazil, although the slaves' collective representations and values were left largely intact. The slave trade renewed the slaves' connection to Africa by continuous contact between old slaves or their Brazilian-born offspring, and new arrivals. Although slavery itself eroded religious values, they were at the same time continuously rejuvenated by new arrivals of slaves from Africa. However, Bastide saw the Brazilian mining regions as exceptional and claimed that African religions did not survive there apart from a few exceptions.⁶⁵ Historical research has shown Bastide's position to be untenable.

Bastide devoted a segment of his study to "survivals" of African religiosity. At the outset he noted that it was impossible to eradicate customs and ceremonies they learned as children from an African's heart. Although slaves were baptized, for the majority Christianity remained something imposed from outside. They did not abandon the practices they had learned in their own countries, and organized societies to maintain African ritual life. Among the positive factors that helped African religions to "survive", Bastide pointed to the fact that the Portuguese colonists were just as superstitious as their slaves. Many whites relied on African healers, if not seeking their help personally, then at least when their slaves fell ill. But slave owners also feared these "medicine men" because they were familiar with toxic plants, and could harm the masters or their property by poisoning their slaves.⁶⁶ These features of African religiosity

⁶⁴ Rodrigues 2005, pp. 280-281.

⁶⁵ Bastide 1978, pp. 44-50.

⁶⁶ Bastide 1978, pp. 128-132.

in colonial Brazilian society become evident when examining the documentary records from Minas Gerais.

Souza has argued that popular religiosity in colonial Brazil came to be characterized by its hybrid nature that included diverse elements from the European, African, and Amerindian traditions. This made the religious landscape both unique and multifaceted. The Afro-Catholic syncretism of the slaves was a reality that was based on the preservation of the myths and rites of African religions. Catholic religion mixed with these foreign elements and produced a composite of African, Indian, and Catholic practices. However, generally the clergymen and certain segments of the elite saw syncretism as diabolical, and as such it had to be combated.⁶⁷

But just how far did this syncretism evolve? Historians who have written about African religions in Brazil have come to differing conclusions. In a pioneering work on popular religiosity, Laura de Mello e Souza, who on many points converges with Bastide's views, has argued for a high degree of syncretism. She accepted Bastide's arguments that the African religions in Brazil were modified, because slaves arrived from many different cultures, and because they were subjected to Catholic influences. However, Souza diverges from Bastide's interpretation on an important point. Whereas Bastide argued for the survival of certain African traits in Brazil, Souza interprets black popular religion not as remnants or survivals but as a living colonial phenomenon that was part of the people's daily life.⁶⁸ She effectively downplays the significance of the African background of different religious practices such as spirit possession and divination, a viewpoint apparent in her later work as well.⁶⁹ In the same vein, André Nogueira has argued that the possible African nuances in healing rituals in Minas Gerais went through a series of modifications and were influenced by a strong dialogue with Catholicism. In his view, these practices were not "purely" African but peculiar to *mineiro* society of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰

I have no objection to Souza's interpretation that popular religions be seen as a living part of the Brazilian colonial society, because there were modifications and adaptations in all religious traditions – Amerindian, African, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim – that shared the same social space in Brazil. But to argue that popular religion was completely syncretistic and that African religious traditions were simply lost on arrival seems an oversimplification. As shown in Chapter 3, from a demographic standpoint there are few reasons to argue that African cultural values were lost in Brazil. Coercion and violence to which the slaves were subjected have been cited as another reason that African

⁶⁷ Souza 1986, p. 88, 144.

⁶⁸ Souza 1986, pp. 93-99.

⁶⁹ Souza 2005.

⁷⁰ Nogueira 2007a.

traditions were suppressed and lost, but again many scholars have argued that, in the mining environment of Minas Gerais, Africans who were not confined to the mines had considerable freedom to move about and they enjoyed many liberties.⁷¹ These combining factors oppose Souza's generalization.

It can also be argued that there was little need for Africans to modify some of their religious practices, because these practices were interpreted in the same way both by Europeans and Africans. Divination, for example, existed both in Africa and Europe, although in different forms. It also existed in the different regions of Africa from where the slaves were exported, even if practiced differently in various regions.⁷² Thus, a Central African diviner could have easily continued using the same divination rituals learned in Angola if requested by his or her master to find an escaped slave, who could have been a West African. All three would have understood the meaning and purpose of the divination ritual, although the actual ritual used by the Central African diviner would have been different from those with which the master and West African slave were familiar.

Although not concentrating on eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, James Sweet has reached very different conclusions than Souza and Nogueira in his study of African religiosity in colonial Brazil. According to Sweet, Central African religion emerged as a counter-hegemonic force in Brazil. He has argued that, in the eighteenth century, the process of cultural exchange was most evident in the relationships between Africans of different regional origins, not between Africans and Portuguese. According to Sweet, slaves in Brazil shared a broad cosmological core, with religion being used to explain, predict, and control events in the world, and it allowed them to forge common understandings in the process of becoming "Africans". Sweet has identified divination and spirit possession rituals that can clearly be connected to the regions in Africa from which the slaves who employed these rituals originated.⁷³

In Brazil, as in Africa, magico-religious practices were intimately linked to the day-to-day needs of Africans and their descendants. Whether slave or free, through the use of witchcraft and spirit possession rituals Africans sought to resolve tangible problems that afflicted individual members of the community. As will be shown below, West Central African healers and diviners in Minas Gerais retained many of the traditional ritual practices that were prevalent in their homelands in Angola and Kongo. In some cases these religious specialists demonstrated a high degree of syncretism in their practice while clearly basing their rituals on a Central African understanding of illness, health, and healing.

⁷¹ Russell-Wood 2002; Higgins 1999; Paiva 2001.

⁷² Thornton 1998a, pp. 240-242; Sweet 2003, p. 131.

⁷³ Sweet 2003.

6.2.1 African Spirit Possession, Healing, and Magic in Minas Gerais

Africans and Indians were the great healers of colonial Brazil, offering not only the herbal cures that were known to be effective, but also the special ritual proceedings that were part and parcel of their cultural universe.⁷⁴ Central African religiosity was clearly manifested in spirit possession rituals that were widespread in colonial Brazil. These were most often referred to by the corrupted Kimbundu term *calundu*. In West Central Africa, the original term was *quilundo*, and it was used to describe any ancestral spirit who possessed the living. It was a widely recognized term in West Central Africa, and it was recognizable for Central Africans in Brazil, as *calundu* became the shared idiom for spirit possession in the slave and free black communities.

Calundu took root in Brazil around the middle of the seventeenth century, when it came to describe not only the actual spirits that possessed the ill person, but especially the ceremonies and dances that accompanied possession and divination. Healers, or *calundureiros*, were closer and more familiar to the slaves than Christian priests, and were viewed as more effective in helping with various troubles.⁷⁵ The majority of ceremonies were conducted in order to determine the cause of illness. White slave-owners also adopted the services of African healers, and it became a widespread practice to send ailing slaves to “Negro curers”. As Souza has shown, *calundus* were generally used in Minas Gerais since the early colonization of the area, and the *devassas eclesiásticas* conducted in the region confirm that they were very popular during the eighteenth century. During ecclesiastical visits, testimonies against African healers or *calundureiros* were heard in the majority of villages.⁷⁶

Perhaps the best-known description of *calundu* was left by Nuno Marques Pereira who, on his way from Bahia to Minas Gerais in the 1720s, stayed overnight on the property of a slave master. During the night, he was awakened by “horrendous” shouting that seemed to him the “confusion of hell”. Next morning he complained to the master, who promised to order his slaves not to perform *calundus* the next night. In a further explanation, the slave owner told Pereira that *calundus* were “entertainment or divination” that the slaves had brought from their own countries. They were used for discovering various things, such as the cause of illnesses and the location of lost things, and also for having good luck in hunting and agriculture. Pereira then proceeded to preach

⁷⁴ Souza 1986, p. 166.

⁷⁵ Souza 1986, p. 263.

⁷⁶ Souza 1986, p. 264. Sweet 2003, p. 254, n. 11, reports that he found only two *calundu* cases in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century from the Inquisition sources. However, besides ignoring many denunciations in various *cadernos do promotor* of the Lisbon Inquisition, he did not study the most important testimonies regarding *calundus* in Minas Gerais, namely the *devassas eclesiásticas* that can be found in the *Arquivo Eclesiástico da Arquidiocese de Mariana*.

to the slaves about their “sinful” practice and ordered the master to burn all of the musical instruments that were used in the *calundus*.⁷⁷

According to Sweet, *calundu* ceremonies varied somewhat from healer to healer, but the broad outline remained the same for all practitioners. All of the ceremonies also remained distinctly Central African in form and philosophy, even though some of the cures were made for whites. The common elements in the healing rituals were the playing of African musical instruments and singing in African languages. After dancing, the possessed fell into a trance or unconsciousness. After the healer rose again, he or she began to speak in a strange voice, calling for spirits from the Other World. Usually offerings were provided to appease the spirit’s hunger, and to get information on the causes of the illness. Finally, the spirit suggested an herbal remedy to cure the illness.⁷⁸

Slaves coming to Brazil from West Africa were certainly as well armed in magico-religious practices as Central Africans, and there was some symbolic and structural overlap in these differing traditions. The purposes of divination, judicial ordeals, and possession of people and things were the same for both groups of people despite geographical distance within the African continent. All of these various forms of religious practice revealed information about the Other World to the healer-diviners. The role of the religious specialists was to serve as mediums between the two worlds and transmit revelations to their clients.⁷⁹ Hawthorne has demonstrated that the Upper Guinean coastal peoples believed in both natural and ancestral spirits, as was the case with Central Africans. Illness and death were thought to result from supernatural forces, and Upper Guineans relied on an array of mediums, diviners, and healers. A special function of religious specialists was the crafting of talismans, known as *grisgris* and *guarda di kurpu*. These practices were recreated by Upper Guineans in Amazonia, where they were taken in large numbers during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁸⁰ Similarly, the Gbe-speaking peoples of the Mina Coast shared a belief in voduns. Referred to by Europeans as “fetishes”, voduns are best understood as forces or powers, especially those associated with the sky, the earth, and the sea. These powers were revered and could be only invoked in specially designated temples or shrines, where the devotees called on the voduns in a series of carefully designed rituals with specific orations, dances, and offerings. The invocation of the voduns led to the possession of the devotees by their patron deity.⁸¹

Identifying the origins of African ritual specialists in Minas Gerais is often problematic because the references to healers and *calundu* ceremonies that

⁷⁷ Pereira 1939, pp. 123-126.

⁷⁸ Sweet 2003, pp. 148-149.

⁷⁹ Thornton 1998a, pp. 235-253.

⁸⁰ Hawthorne 2010, pp. 217-219, 233-245.

⁸¹ Sweet 2011, pp. 17-22.

are found in the *devassas eclesiasticas* are usually vague. Even when witnesses knew more about the rituals used by Africans, they did not want to reveal their participation in such ceremonies. Often what they reported was based on hearsay, and their testimonies also demonstrated genuine misunderstandings as to what went on in the ceremonies to which they had no access. However, even in cases that do not disclose much about the rituals, there is additional information that shows how important the services of the healers were to the people who sought their help.

In the early decades of colonization in Minas Gerais, West African slaves dominated the region demographically. This was also reflected in the earliest ecclesiastical visits in 1722 and 1723. All of the African healers whose origins were named during these visits were identified as Mina. The most prominent among these was a slave named Miguel Mina, who lived with his master in Camargos. Miguel carried “an insect with two horns” or a locust, which “advised” him in his divination. According to the witnesses, Miguel fed the locust and talked to it, making it jump onto his head or belly or to the floor. They complained that his master Paulo Gonçalves de Almeida consented to these rituals and even received a *jornal*, a daily or weekly wage that Miguel earned from his religious practice. Miguel, who was known to his fellow slaves by his African name Oanun, also taught his “cures and visions” to other Africans. Among his disciplines was a slave named Tereza, who was denounced for both healing and taking lives. It was said that Tereza had received a *bolsa* or a pouch from Miguel that she used as a protective amulet. Tereza, in turn, had made a *bolsa* for her master, who was in love with her.⁸²

Other West African women who were denounced in 1722-1723 were suspected of using destructive witchcraft rather than healing powers. In Passagem of Mariana, Antônia Mina was accused of killing slaves with witchcraft. The suspicions had been strengthened after a pot of boiling water was found under her bed. In the same locality, Ignacia Mina had aroused suspicion by giving a glass of *aguardente* to another slave, who had found hair and a piece of a nail in the glass.⁸³ These West African slaves, along with freed blacks⁸⁴ and an occasional Central African, like Gracia named at the outset of this chapter, were some of the religious specialists who kept their ancestral practices alive in Minas Gerais and even passed them on to other Africans, as Miguel/Oanun was said to do.

References to Central African healing and divination practices increased in the documentary record from the 1730s. *Calundu* became the

⁸² AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Livro 1722-1723, ff. 34-38v.

⁸³ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Livro 1722-1723, ff. 175-176, 183-187v.

⁸⁴ See AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Livro 1722-1723, f. 19v (Cosme Forro), and f. 44 (Mariana Carvalho, preta forra).

common term to describe these practices although witnesses did not always make clear who the individuals engaged in these practices were and what exactly constituted a *calundu* ceremony. These rituals were often referred to as a “feast” or as a “dance”. For example, Manuel, *preto forro*, was denounced in 1731 for “making certain feasts with other blacks, which they call *calundus*”.⁸⁵

In some cases, however, the religious specialists were explicitly recognized. When they were Central Africans, *calundu* clearly referred to a spirit possession ceremony. Catarina Angola, a slave owned by Domingos Coelho, was denounced in 1734 near the village of Santa Luzia. Various witnesses said that Catarina and various “*negras Angolas*” or female slaves from Angola, as well as some *mulatas*, convened in the house of Gaspar Pimentel to “dance the *calundus*”. Pimentel’s slave Juliana was named as one of the slaves behind this religious ritual. The slaves did not assemble in secret but Pimentel gave his consent so that the slaves could maintain their ancestral religious practices. In the same village, a *preta forra* named Isabel Moreira was denounced for “dancing the *calundus* with other *negras*”. João do Vale Peixoto, a 23-year-old merchant, said that he had observed the blacks first-hand at their ceremony, and that he could also hear when they were dancing because of the noise at these gatherings.⁸⁶ Gaspar Pimentel was found guilty of consenting to the “superstitious dances of *calundus*”.⁸⁷ Catarina Angola was reprimanded before the Episcopal visitors in 1734 in Santa Luzia. She accepted the admonishment and promised to repent her actions. It is questionable whether Catarina herself thought that she was invoking the Devil with her behavior, but this was the view of the ecclesiastics.⁸⁸

The denunciation and condemnation of Catarina Angola is important because it indicates that African healers and diviners could and did operate with the help of others originating from the same African region. Catarina enlisted the help of her countrywomen in order to recreate a familiar religious ritual in a foreign environment. It only took a single white man to provide a suitable place in which to hold the ritual. In such an environment, there was no need to make any modifications to the ritual practice. Musical instruments, which were an important part of these ceremonies, could easily be fabricated in Brazil from local raw materials. Moreover, Catarina and her assistants could easily have communicated in their mother tongue, most likely Kimbundu. With such prerequisites, Central African spirit possession and healing ceremonies remained intact despite the dehumanizing experience of enslavement that these women had endured.

⁸⁵ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1731, f. 40v.

⁸⁶ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1733 (1/2), ff. 90v-91, 94v.

⁸⁷ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1733 (1/2), f. 108v.

⁸⁸ ACM, Visitas Pastorais, Paróquia de Sabará, f. 52v.

Slaves from Kongo also began to be accused of practicing magical arts in the 1730s. Maria Conga was accused of witchcraft in 1733 in Horta do Campo. She was rumored to have killed people with *feitiços*, and even when not working witchcraft, she was seen as rebellious. Her rebelliousness was experienced firsthand by the priest in charge of the visit, who ordered Maria to appear before him. As she refused to appear on the pretext of being sick and incapable, her master Alberto Dias was reprimanded instead.⁸⁹ Another Maria Conga was falsely accused in São João del Rei in the same year for working love-magic to get her former master Father Francisco Barreto de Menezes to forget all other women and “to look only at her”. According to rumors, Maria had bought an unguent from a black healer specializing in charms. The investigating priest noted that the charge was not proven legally because the rumors had been started by two men who harbored a mortal hatred of the priest. Maria was brought in for examination but she denied all allegations.⁹⁰

Calundu ceremonies were not used solely by Africans as their descendants also adopted these practices. This was only natural since Brazilian-born slaves were usually raised by their mothers in a community of slaves brought from Africa. Violante Coutinha, *crioula forra*, was denounced in 1734 in northern Minas Gerais for “dancing and making *calundus*”. The shoemaker Manuel Antunes de Carvalho, who denounced Violante, had to admit that he had never seen anything suspicious or superstitious in Violante’s behavior. All he had seen were blacks gathering in her house and playing *batuques*.⁹¹ What outsiders judged as a religious ceremony could just as well have been a simple pastime or a feast engaged in by blacks. In this case, there seems to have been no animosity between Violante, a Brazilian-born freedwoman, and African-born slaves, so long thought to have been a characteristic of Brazilian slave society. Animosity did not always characterize the relations between individuals in these two groups with everyday life offering many situations in which Africans and *crioulos* cooperated. Brazilian-born slaves were not necessarily far removed from the African heritage of their parents but could cultivate it, as was done by Violante.⁹²

African elements were generically present in a case in Brumado in 1764, in which a black *feiticeiro* by the name of Domingos Calanduzeiro was denounced for corrupting the slaves of the parish who assembled in his house for *batuque* dances. On one occasion, Domingos had been seen curing a slave girl owned by Manoel Freire. During the ritual, Domingos was surrounded by a

⁸⁹ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1733 (2/2), ff. 49, 61-61v, 70.

⁹⁰ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1733 (2/2), ff. 92v, 102, 106v.

⁹¹ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1734, f. 96v.

⁹² In a telling example from early nineteenth century north-east Brazil, Hawthorne 2010, p. 186, has demonstrated that Brazilian-born children of African slaves sometimes married Africans brought from the same region as their parents.

quantity of blacks with three or four of them playing drums.⁹³ This denunciation does not reveal the African origin or ethnicity of Domingos or the other blacks, and it is possible that this gathering included slaves from different parts of Africa. There are few indications that the participation in *calundu* ceremonies would have been ethnically exclusive, but one such case illustrates that it was possible to be more selective as to who was allowed to participate. The freed blacks Hyvo Lopes and his wife Maria Cardoso were sentenced to do penance at the entrance of the main church of Mariana in 1750 before being banished from the bishopric of Mariana for a year. In the rituals that they had organized the familiar features are manifest. They danced and sang “in their own habit” until someone lay on the ground like a dead person, and somebody began to describe and divine “what was happening in their native lands”. Extraordinarily, they admitted only “blacks of their nation excluding those who were not”.⁹⁴ The documentation does not reveal which nation Hyvo and his wife represented. Central and West African divination practices resembled each other to the degree that Hyvo’s followers could have originated in either region.

Only a few years before the condemnation of Hyvo and Maria in Mariana, a similar congregation of blacks was discovered and reprehended in the village of Paracatu in north-western Minas Gerais. In this case, the ritual was organized by West Africans who identified themselves as Courá, originating in the area near present-day Lagos. According to the testimonies, the blacks were engaged in a ritual called *Acotundá* or the dance of Tunda. They congregated in the house of a freedwoman named Josefa Maria. The spirit possession that took place in this ritual closely resembled Central African practices. One witness described how the participants fell to the ground pretending they were dead. There was also a syncretistic element to the ritual. A woman named Quitéria led the ritual and spoke in her language, saying that she was God and a daughter of Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Anthony. Another black woman danced and said that she was the god who had made the heaven and the earth, the water and the stones, and all else that was in the world. Besides possession, the ritual centered on a doll or a statue placed on an ornamented altar that was adored by the participants. Interestingly, one witness said that the ornaments included “money of the Mina Coast”, probably referring to cowrie shells. Further resemblance to Central African rituals was evident in the sacrifice of a chicken. Eight of the 20 participants who were mentioned in the testimonies were of the Courá nation. Six of the others who were identified by their origin were Calundá, Mina, Mina-Courá, Lanu, Angola, and Crioula. Six persons were not identified by their “nation”. The social condition of the participants indicates that most of them had already spent considerable time in Brazil. Nine of the

⁹³ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Z-10, ff. 49-49v.

⁹⁴ Pires 2008, p. 108.

participants were *forros/forras*, seven were slaves, and the status of four was not mentioned.⁹⁵

The inclusion of a freedwoman named Sebastiana Angola among the participants in the Acotundá ritual is not surprising, since she must have shared a similar understanding of the purpose of the ritual with other participants, who were mainly from West Africa. Although some of the symbolic content and certainly the language spoken by others were foreign to her, the shared idiom of spirit possession must have appealed to her. The references to Our Lady of the Rosary and Saint Anthony in the ritual indicate that at least some of the participants were familiar or perhaps even members in the rosary brotherhood of Paracatú. As nine of the participants were former slaves and had spent several years in Brazil, they were probably familiar with Catholic doctrines and symbols and freely incorporated these into a ritual that clearly derived from their homeland in West Africa.

Although few healers would have operated strictly among individuals of the same African “nation”, bonds between Africans who shared the same origin could be recognized in ritual settings in other ways. It was common for healers to choose an assistant from among their countrymen. This offered them the advantage of support from a person who was already familiar with the purpose and content of the performed rituals. Moreover, an assistant could have helped the healer locate and collect suitable medicinal plants to achieve the desired cures. João da Costa, a white slave owner, employed a healer named Francisco Angola around 1758 to heal slaves on his *fazenda* after he had successfully cured one of João’s *crioula* slaves. According to the testimony, João da Costa selected “his slave André of the Angola nation” to help Francisco heal people. André would have been a perfect aide to Francisco, and it seems that João da Costa understood well the affinity that these men shared based on their common Central African origin.⁹⁶

It was not rare that Africans worked together in organizing *calundu* rituals. In the 1760s in Ouro Preto, three blacks were united at least temporarily in curing people. Luiza Angola, João Barbeiro and a third unidentified African were accused in 1764 of performing *calundus* together, to which blacks and *pardos* were invited. João Moreira, a free black of the Moçambique “nation”, testified that João Barbeiro had failed in curing a black *forra* named Catharina Moreira, to whom he had administered bloodletting and herbal remedies. João Barbeiro from the parish of Padre Faria seems to have been sought-after and versatile healer in the 1760s in Ouro Preto. In his cures he employed both

⁹⁵ Mott 1988, pp. 87-100.

⁹⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 121, f. 213. I am grateful to Luiz Mott for kindly indicating this archival source.

blessings and purgatives.⁹⁷

Although highly respected among the slave community, African religious specialists were feared by slave owners because of their paradoxical function. On the one hand, they could be seen as witches who worked malign magic against blacks and whites alike. On the other hand, those who possessed healing powers were called upon to counteract the effects of witchcraft. Sometimes these roles overlapped. In the second half of the eighteenth century in Minas Gerais, an unidentified black *feiticeiro* was accused of being capable of curing illnesses, but he was also said to be able to incapacitate people and make them unable to work just by reciting certain words.⁹⁸ Another example is the slave Pedro, who was accused in 1768 of killing various slaves of his master Gonçalo Francisco da Silva. When one of Silva's slaves was dying, he decided to be more persuasive with Pedro and forced him to give some powders to the sick slave, who recovered almost immediately.⁹⁹ Slaves suspected of being witches could be sold by their masters. In 1763, the miner Salomon Muniz explained during an ecclesiastical visit how he had sold his slave José Mina because many of his slaves had died and José was the one who was suspected of killing them with witchcraft. Trying to play down his own belief in magic, Muniz told the priests that he could not know whether the deaths had been caused by witchcraft or by natural causes. The fact that Muniz sold his slave, however, clearly reveals that he believed his slave was using harmful magic against his property.¹⁰⁰

6.2.2 The Arsenal of Remedies

The methods of the healers were extensive and varied. A famed Central African healer operating in Sabará in the 1730s, Luzia Pinta blew on her patients and smelt them to know what sickness bothered them. A slave of Bernardo Pereira Brasil, in the parish de Nossa Senhora de Nazaré do Inficcionado, removed bones and poisons from the bodies of his patients by sucking them into his mouth. According to Souza, it was believed that breath and suction could remove a spell from a victim's body, causing it to be expelled orally, rectally or even through the vagina. Healers were known to examine the grounds around the sick person's residence to determine if magical objects that could cause the illness were hidden somewhere. All these procedures were guided by a common

⁹⁷ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Z-10, ff. 114v-115, 116v.

⁹⁸ Souza, 1986, pp. 167-168.

⁹⁹ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Z-12 (1767-1777), ff. 34v-35.

¹⁰⁰ AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, 1726-1743, ff. 73v-74. Similarly, a West African healer named Domingos Álvares was sold away from Pernambuco by his master Jacinto de Freitas because it was rumored that Domingos killed cattle, horses, and slaves belonging to his master with witchcraft. Sweet 2011, pp. 69-71.

principle of expelling or neutralizing a type of negative, destructive energy responsible for maladies and adversities.¹⁰¹

Medicinal plants were most certainly used by all Central African healers. Witnesses in the inquisitorial or ecclesiastical proceedings never named the actual ingredients that were administered as natural medicine by the healers to their patients. In the documentation, they are generically referred to simply as herbs and roots. The influence of African healers in Minas Gerais is reflected, however, in the names of some medicinal plants that are found in the region. Caetano José Cardoso, Cirurgião Mor in Vila Rica, mentioned in his report on medicinal plants in 1813 a plant called *calumba*, the root of which was used to cure intestinal problems such as flatulence and dysentery, as well as fevers.¹⁰² Another plant that must have been used by Central African healers was *calunga* (*simaba ferruginea*), an indigenous Brazilian plant that is also found in Minas Gerais.¹⁰³ As Obi has noted, the term *kalunga* was used in Angola “to identify aspects of the natural world (ocean, rivers, lakes, caves) and the supernatural world (ancestors, God, and the land of the dead).” According to Central African cosmological system, it was believed that bodies of water were bridges connecting the land of the living and the dead.¹⁰⁴ It is likely that the medicinal properties of the plant found in Brazil were discovered by Central African healers, who named it *calunga* because they considered it an important remedy.

Besides using indigenous American plants in their healing rituals, African healers in Brazil could make use of many plants with which they were familiar in Africa, such as aloe vera, anise and tamarind. Other New World species that are botanically related to known African medicinals were used as remedies by enslaved Africans, who identified closely allied specimens of the same genus in the Americas and, through experimentation, brought them into use. In this way, Africans could utilize the herbal knowledge they had acquired in Africa, and add to their repertoire medicinal plants that they got to know in Brazil.¹⁰⁵

The use of emetics was a common practice among African healers. If it were suspected that the patient had been bewitched, emetics were used in order to get the patient to vomit the *fetiços* that caused them to suffer. The healer Francisco Angola gave emetics to his patient Josefa Crioula. She vomited hair, birds’ nails, needles, and various other things. On another occasion, Francisco

¹⁰¹ Souza 1986, pp. 169-170.

¹⁰² Cardoso 1902, p. 747.

¹⁰³ Nogueira 2006, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ Obi 2008, pp. 3-4.

¹⁰⁵ Carney and Rosomoff 2009, pp. 90-91. Several Brazilian plants related to African medicinals continue to be used in *candomblé* ceremonies in Brazil. In the context of *candomblé*, these plants are known by their African vernacular names. See Voeks 1997, pp. 143-145, 174-177.

Angola was asked to heal a white man named Domingos Pereira. The treatment was a long process. During a 10-day period, Francisco treated his patient with various herbs and roots of medicinal plants. When he judged that the patient was ready, he announced that the patient would vomit the *feitiços* through his mouth the next night. Various people gathered to witness this event, including João da Costa, Francisco's patron, and Josefa Crioula, whom Francisco had healed earlier. Francisco began by spreading an unguent on Domingos Pereira's throat. Then he took a pouch or a talisman that he carried around his neck, sprinkled it with *aguardente* or sugar cane brandy and placed it near Domingos Pereira's neck. After these preparations, Francisco took a round box and partially opened it so that only he could peek in it, and poured some *aguardante* in the box, saying that it was not yet time for the *feitiços* to exit. He made crosses on the patient's head, massaged his neck and throat, and peeked into the box every once in a while. This took three hours, during which Francisco talked like an exorcist, invoking God and various saints. When the time was ripe, Francisco put his hand in Domingos' throat and pulled out the *feitiços*, which again included nails of birds and humans, and other things. After this, Francisco still continued treating Domingos for another two weeks, at the end of which the patient said that he had fully recovered.¹⁰⁶

In addition to medicinal plants, colonial Brazilians believed in the efficacy of utilizing bodily secretions such as saliva, sperm, urine, and mucus as therapeutic substances. Further, nails, bones and hair were used as vitalizing ingredients in some cures.¹⁰⁷ Here, it is essential to note that these were used not only by African healers, but that white surgeons recommended their use as well. For example, in a book published in Lisbon in 1726, Brás Luís de Abreu recommended the use of bones and viscera of animals such as donkeys, sheep, and doves for various illnesses. According to him, the burnt skull of a dog was effective in curing jaundice, and dog's teeth, when burnt to ashes and gargled with wine, helped with toothache.¹⁰⁸

Besides these methods, people in Minas Gerais as well as elsewhere in eighteenth-century Brazil believed strongly in the efficacy of words. Prayers were an integral part of treatment. Both African and white healers could use Catholic prayers such as Ave Maria, the Lord's Prayer, and Credo,¹⁰⁹ as Francisco Angola did in his healing ceremonies. These practices were prevalent and well-established in Portugal, where folk healers commonly recited prayers or special words and verses as potential treatment.¹¹⁰ *Quebranto*, a weakness or illness often attributed to *mau olhado*, or the evil eye, was among the afflictions

¹⁰⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 121, f. 214.

¹⁰⁷ Ribeiro 1997, p. 71.

¹⁰⁸ Nogueira 2007a.

¹⁰⁹ Nogueira 2006, p. 67.

¹¹⁰ Bethencourt 2004, pp. 77-86.

for which the services of popular healers were most frequently sought in Portugal. This ailment was cured with certain words, prayers or incantations, which were performed in a mumbled, barely audible voice or in a language unintelligible to their clients.¹¹¹ This practice was transferred intact to Minas Gerais and elsewhere in colonial Brazil¹¹² by Portuguese settlers to the extent that it sometimes seemed that every village had its own healer who specialized in “curing with words”. For example, the ecclesiastical visit that traversed the mining region in 1748 and 1749 heard denunciations against these healers almost at every stop. These popular healers were usually men who “healed with words furuncles and *cobrantos* [*quebrantos*]”. Some of them concentrated on treating furuncles on animals.¹¹³

The method of healing people and animals with powerful words becomes especially interesting when Africans were denounced for this practice. For example, Domingos, simply identified as a black, was denounced in Congonhas do Campo in April 1749 for healing various illnesses with words. Only two months later, a black slave owned by João Batista Mourão was denounced in Prados as a “*curador de palavras e benzedor*”, or a healer who used words and blessings.¹¹⁴ In neither case was it revealed whether these Africans used prayers spoken in Portuguese or incantations in their native tongue. If the former, it would suggest that these healers were moving towards employing syncretistic methods, perhaps in order to attract a larger clientele or to avoid suspicion for using doubtful non-Christian methods.

The West Central African practice of taking herbal baths to alleviate or prevent illness was practiced in Minas Gerais at least by a healer named Roque Angola, who was denounced in 1777. Roque had an intimate relationship with his owner, a *parda* woman named Brizida Maria de Araujo, who openly consented to and encouraged Roque’s religious practices. In preparing the herbal bath, Roque and Brizida relied on a syncretistic method. They dipped an image of Christ, which Brizida carried around his neck, in a caldron together with the herbs, and washed themselves with the water. After washing, Roque and Brizida dressed in their best clothes and began a *calundu* ceremony. Brizida taught the participants in the ritual that the souls of the dead took possession of

¹¹¹ Walker 2005, p. 58.

¹¹² Souza 1986, pp. 179-180.

¹¹³ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Z-4 (1748-49), ff. 11v-13v, 21, 59-59v, 67v-68, 81v, 84, 85v-86, 96-96v, 98, 104, 105v-106, 107, 120-120v, 130, 131-131v, 136v, 137v, 142, 155-155v, 160v-161, 169, 180, 188-188v, 190, 198-199, 203-203v, 213v. It seems almost as if this visitation targeted in particular popular healers who were using special words as part of their remedies. Notably, some of the popular healers were denounced by officially licensed surgeons, who were in effect testifying against their professional competitors. On officially licensed *médicos* and popular healers as part of Inquisition proceedings in eighteenth-century Portugal, see further Walker 2005.

¹¹⁴ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Z-4 (1748-49), ff. 131, 155-155v.

the living. In these rituals, Roque was possessed by Brizida's deceased child.¹¹⁵

The use of the crucifix in the preparation of Roque's and Brizida's herbal bath had the purpose of fortifying the concoction. It was thus an important and active ingredient in the mixture. A similar method was used by a healer-diviner named Pedro Teixeira of the Congo "nation", who was denounced in 1790 in Mariana by his wife Maria da Costa, who was a Brazilian-born black and freedwoman. According to Maria's testimony, Pedro Teixeira conducted a similar ritual every year on the feast day of Saint John. He took a couple of images of Christ and saints and crushed them in a mortar. He then poured the mashed images into a caldron, added water and some herbs, and put it on a fire to boil. Pedro used the resulting mixture to "give fortunes to women and men" who sought him out.¹¹⁶ Although from the Catholic point of view it might seem that Pedro was violating the images of Christ and saints, from the healer's point of view, using these images made perfect sense because he believed that they contained a spiritual power that could be harnessed to give potency to the herbal mixture. In two other cases from eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, there are more detailed descriptions of Central African healer-diviners whose ritual practice was clearly syncretistic, a hybrid of African ancestral practices mixed with Catholic beliefs.

Luzia Pinta

A more revealing description of healing methods in the context of a *calundu* ritual comes from the Inquisition case of Luzia Pinta, one of the most famous Central African healers in Sabará during the eighteenth century. According to this description, Luzia would perform the ritual on a little altar with a canopy, a scimitar in her hand, wearing a wide ribbon tied around her head, with the ends of the ribbon toward the back or garbed in a "Turkish manner", as one witness described. During the possession ceremony, two women, identified as Angolas, sang while a man whose origins were not identified played an *atabaque*. The three were all slaves owned by Luzia. They played and sang for one to two hours, and Luzia would appear to be out of her mind, saying things that no one understood. The people she cured would lie down on the ground; she would

¹¹⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 130, f. 374.

¹¹⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6682 (Processo de Pedro Teixeira e outros), f. 5-5v. Pedro Teixeira had a loyal following among other Central Africans. According to Maria da Costa, his rituals were frequented by Antonio José and Joanna da Costa, both freed blacks of the Angola "nation". However, West Africans were not excluded, as is shown by the presence of Narciza Mina, who came from Ouro Preto to participate in the ceremonies organized by Pedro.

move over them a number of times, and it was on these occasions that she said she received the “winds of divination”.¹¹⁷

Sent to Lisbon in December 1741 for interrogation by the Inquisition, Luzia was described as a woman of around 50 years of age, tall and stout, with scarification marks close to her forehead and one on each cheek. She was an unmarried *forra* from Luanda, whose parents had been slaves. She had been baptized in Luanda in the Conceição parish. Luzia confessed to having used herbs and roots for healing purposes, but she denied the use of divinations and having a pact with the Devil. Luzia was a Christian who observed religious precepts, confessed and participated in Mass regularly, and knew her Catholic prayers. She identified the medicines she administered as the root of “abatua” (*abuta grandifolia*, also known as *butua* in contemporary sources) and “pau-santo” and said that these made her patients vomit. According to Luzia, being a healer was a destiny given to her by God. Speaking of *calundu*, she defined it as a “contagious disease” that she had suddenly caught. The only way to handle it was through the ceremonies, playing instruments and dancing. She attributed her experience and the words that came out of her mouth to heavenly intervention. Pointing even further in the direction of religious syncretism, Luzia cited the Virgin Mary as the patroness of her healing. She told the Inquisitors that she had spent the gold she earned from her healing practice on masses for Saint Anthony and Saint Gonçalo, the ones truly responsible for her achievements. Not convinced, the Inquisition condemned her in the end to Castro Marim in the Algarve for a period of four years.¹¹⁸

Luzia told the Inquisitors that, in Angola, the disease that they called *calandus* was transmitted from person to person and that her aunt Maria might have “communicated” it to her, although Luzia was not certain of it because she had been so young. In any case, she said that once during a Mass in a church in Sabará the illness returned to her. Not knowing what remedy to apply to it, Luzia turned to a black slave named Miguel, who told her that the illness was that of the *calundus* and could be cured by playing some instruments and doing other things.¹¹⁹ It thus seems that Luzia’s initiation as a religious specialist had already begun as a girl in Luanda, although her aunt did not have an opportunity to complete it because of Luzia’s sale to Brazil. In Minas Gerais, however, she was healed by a black healer and probably took part in a *calundu* ceremony before starting to practice as a healer-diviner. It is not clear whether Luzia was formally taught by Miguel or whether she began her healing and divination

¹¹⁷ The case of Luzia Pinta is described in Souza 1986, pp. 352-357 and Souza 2005; Mott 1994; Marcussi 2006 and 2009. The original documents are in ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 252 (Processo de Luzia Pinta).

¹¹⁸ Souza, 1986, pp. 352-357; Mott 1994.

¹¹⁹ Mott 1994.

practice by imitating Miguel and others who were practicing *calundus* in the vicinity of Sabará.

In Luzia's case, syncretism between Central African conceptions of spirit possession and Catholic ideas of God and saints was evident. It is likely that in front of the Inquisitors Luzia emphasized the Catholic side of her healing practice and her connection to Catholic saints in order to convince the priests of her innocence. However, there is also evidence of Luzia's formal adherence to Catholic rituals: her baptism as a child in Luanda, and her participation in Mass in Sabará. In a testimony, captain-major Diogo de Sousa Carvalho said that she had heard Luzia say during a *calundu* ceremony that "God told her on those occasions what to do".¹²⁰ Thus, a Catholic identity was not something that Luzia reserved only for the Inquisitors, as her customers would also have identified her as Christian. For Luzia and many of her patients, there was probably nothing contradictory in syncretistic rituals that mixed Central African ancestral traditions with Catholic beliefs. Rather, these different religious traditions seem to have strengthened Luzia's spiritual power and convinced blacks and whites alike of the potency of her rituals.

Pai Caetano

Perhaps the most complete description of a Central African healer's arsenal of remedies can be found in the inventory that was written after the arrest of Caetano da Costa, also known as Pai Caetano, in Vila Rica in 1791. Pai Caetano was an Angolan freedman detained for using various forms of magic to heal but also to harm other people. In his dwelling place were found two amulets or poaches made of lizard's skin, inside which were relics made of brass. The first relic had glass on one side and various particles inside of it which Caetano claimed were Agnus Dei. The other relic had compartments that contained "various wrapped-up papers". Also found in Caetano's apartment were two brass Veronicas (engraved saint's images); two pewter sheets with "glass and various images"; one parchment dealing with Saint Francis; one skull with teeth (possibly a fish skull); some incense; a coat of arms with text written in "round letters"; some papers in a scapular that had hand-written text not in Portuguese or Latin, with three of the papers having various crosses drawn on them, some had images of saints, one paper had the picture of the crucified Christ on it, and there were even some folios of a breviary with text written in "round letters"; two bulls of the dead; one hand-written prayer with five souls drawn at the end, the souls representing the seven souls in purgatory, with a request that these

¹²⁰ Mott 1994.

souls grant Caetano everything that he has on his mind and give him fortune, and another prayer with three crosses at the end, and various other letters and papers, and an *Abc*; one prayer of Saint Caetano; one bound copy of the book *Triunfo Eucharistico*; one brass image of the crucified Christ on a wooden cross half a span tall; one clay image; two sea horses, one with a five reis coin attached with a string to its neck and the other with a jaguar's tooth attached; one stone that appeared to be marble; two silver spoons and a silver resplendor crown; a short piece of candle; five razors; and one reed pipe.¹²¹

At first sight, Pai Caetano's belongings appear to expose a healer who relied on Christian symbology to offer potent cures to his patients. The image of the cross and Christ, prayers and other texts devoted to Catholic saints, a copy of *Triunfo Eucharistico* that dealt with the rosary brotherhood participation in a religious procession in Vila Rica in 1733, and a crucifix, all reveal that Pai Caetano was well versed in Catholic symbols and knew their meaning. The possession of an *Abc* suggests that Caetano had learned at least rudimentary literacy. However, this evidence alone should not lead to the conclusion that Caetano was a devout Catholic, because he had been excommunicated a few years earlier, while living in the parish of São Bartholomeu, for ignoring Lent regulations.¹²² This hybrid collection of obviously Catholic items with other emblems that are not as clearly defined in the inventory would perhaps indicate colonial syncretism to some historians, but a different interpretation of Pai Caetano's assortment of spiritual remedies is possible. As has been shown above, in eighteenth-century Angola it was common for Central Africans to adopt Christian symbols in their ceremonies. It would not be hard to imagine that Pai Caetano had learned the significance of these symbols in Africa, although it is impossible to prove. However, if this were the case, the syncretistic process in Minas Gerais should be seen as a continuation of the processes in Africa rather than as a process that commenced in Brazil.

Although 11 people were called to testify against Pai Caetano, their descriptions were very vague in relation to the specific rituals he might have used. Miguel do Rosario, a *crioulo forro* who earned his living as a shopkeeper, informed that he had once seen Caetano use certain dolls, one of which he called Dona Crentina, to divine the whereabouts of a piece of gold. Miguel continued that he had heard it said that, in his *calundu* dances, Caetano used the same dolls which danced, but he also employed the image of Saint Anthony and the crucifixes. Candles were lit during these ceremonies.¹²³ Although not listed in the inventory, the appearance of the image of Saint Anthony of Padua

¹²¹ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 2-2v.

¹²² CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 4v, 12v. João dos Reis, a *crioulo* soldier who testified against Pai Caetano, said this was lacking in faith and paying no obedience to the Church.

¹²³ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 8v.

in the testimony does not come as a surprise. As Slenes has shown, Saint Anthony was the favorite saint in colonial Brazil both in the slave quarters as well as among masters. He has suggested that, for the Kongo and other related slave groups, Saint Anthony had perhaps become a sort of Brazilian *Funza*, the chief of tutelary spirits of water and earth in their new habitat. In Slenes's vision, slaves, who recognized that Saint Anthony was perhaps the patron saint of Brazil, never could have dreamt of spiritual success without Saint Anthony working miracles on their behalf.¹²⁴

One of the items among Pai Caetano's belongings was a marble stone. Nogueira has suggested that this might have been a *pedra d'ara* or altar stone,¹²⁵ that was a very popular charm in the Portuguese colonial world, often mentioned in conjunction with magical cases both in Angola and Brazil. Although the possibility that the mentioned stone was really a *pedra d'ara* cannot be ruled out, it is worth noting that curiously shaped stones were also objects of devotion in the Kimpassi cults that proliferated in the kingdom of Kongo. These were thought of as the sacred objects of the earth that were manifestations of the *bisimbi* spirits.¹²⁶ The cross was an important symbol in Central African cosmology even before the missionary presence in the area, and its significance never diminished. In the Kikongo-speaking world, it symbolized the junction of This World and the Other World.¹²⁷

Another important analogy to Pai Caetano's Central African homeland can be found by considering the souls in purgatory and the request that they bring Pai Caetano everything he needs. Souls in purgatory could be interpreted as representing ancestral spirits and their power to affect what happened in this world. Obvious references to African magic among Pai Caetano's possessions included the amulets made out of a lizard's skin, the sea horses, and a fish skull. Perhaps the unspecified clay image would have revealed more about Pai Caetano's magic arsenal under closer inspection, but his judges were not interested in ethnography. The sea creatures possibly represented water spirits that were popular in Central African belief systems. Slenes has shown that both the Kongo and Mbundu peoples, major suppliers of slaves for South-eastern Brazil, shared a common set of ideas concerning localized water spirits. Many slaves from varied origins in Central Africa would have held shared beliefs in the strong association of territorial spirits and water, and the need to propitiate those spirits for the well-being of the community.¹²⁸

Besides his reputation as a healer, Pai Caetano was also known as a malefactor. It was claimed that he had once kidnapped a female slave of Rosa

¹²⁴ Slenes 2006, p. 306.

¹²⁵ Nogueira 2005, p. 189.

¹²⁶ Slenes 2006, p. 289.

¹²⁷ Thornton 1998b, p. 56.

¹²⁸ Slenes 2002, pp. 196-198.

Antunes and taken her to Catas Altas to sell her.¹²⁹ But this was not among his gravest offences. According to the testimony of Manoel de Magalhães Gomes, on one occasion a *crioulo* named Francisco da Costa had spied through the keyhole while Caetano had been “doing his dances called *calundus*” and had recognized some of the people who participated in the ritual. Francisco then revealed to other people what he had seen. When Pai Caetano heard of this he exclaimed that Francisco did not need to see or say anything more. Shortly afterwards Francisco fell ill with stomach pain and died.¹³⁰ Caetano was also accused of killing another *crioulo* slave named Manoel, who was owned by the late Antonio Mendes de Matos. Manoel had asked Caetano to guard some gold for him. He returned a couple of times to fetch it but since Caetano did not give it back, he went to complain about the swindle to José Alves, who was Caetano’s neighbor. José advised Manoel to not let Caetano get away with the theft, so Manoel returned to Caetano’s house once more. Shortly afterwards, Caetano went to tell José that Manoel had become sick after drinking some *cachaça*, and when José went to Caetano’s house he saw the *crioulo* lying on the floor slobbering in pain, dying the next morning. Finally, it was claimed that Caetano had disposed of his own wife, Domingas *crioula*, who had accused Caetano of “lies, diabolical deceptions, and *calundu* dances” and had begged him to stop practicing similar things. Caetano had then said that his wife would not endure long and shortly afterwards she was also found dead.¹³¹

6.2.3 Clientele

African religious specialists served a wide array of clients. Naturally, Africans and their descendants, whether slave or free, were among their most frequent patients. Although many white men were named as clients of Gracia at the beginning of this chapter, white people were rarely directly cited in denunciations as clients. It was more common that slave owners brought their ailing slaves to African healers in order to restore them to health. This practice took root early on in Minas Gerais. In 1733, a freed black woman named Pascoa living in the parish of Sabará was denounced for divination and healing. A slave owner named Gabriel de Souza Macedo had visited Pascoa’s house with a sick slave. When questioned by the visiting priest about the veracity of these accusations, Macedo admitted that he had taken his slave to the African healer but only after

¹²⁹ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 7. Testimony of Jeronimo Dias de Crasto.

¹³⁰ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 4-4v. Manoel Gomes earned his living by transporting slaves from Rio de Janeiro to Minas Gerais. He had lived in the parish of São Bartholomeu at the same time as Pai Caetano.

¹³¹ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 12-12v. Testimony of João dos Reis, *crioulo forro*, resident in the *arraial* of São Bartholomeu.

another white man, Manuel da Silva Alvarenga, had recommended Pascoa to him. Macedo disclosed that Pascoa used to “make her cures with *aguardente*, roots of trees, and tobacco”. He had left his slave in Pascoa’s house, sending *aguardente*, tobacco, chicken, bread, and wine to the healer. His slave had returned fully recovered after a fortnight, telling Macedo that Pascoa had given him various drinks with roots that had alleviated his condition greatly. In the end, the priests left Macedo, his slave, and Pascoa without punishment.¹³²

It sometimes happened that white people confessed to visiting African healers in order to heal their own illnesses. In 1763, Domingos Marinho from Vila Rica confessed to the inquisitorial interrogators that he had called on the healer (*curandeira*) Maria Cardoso and her protégé Antonio, 16-years old, both free blacks, to cure some ailments that bothered him. The healing process started with several invocations, after which Domingos was treated by running a small white stone and a razor covered with a ball of cotton up and down his body. The ritual also included prayers to the Holy Trinity, to Saint Domingos and Saint Francis, all in the language of these blacks. Later, during his confession, Domingos regretted his actions and declared at the end that Minas Gerais was “infected by the Devil”.¹³³

As has been seen above, the healer Francisco Angola also had white people among his patients in Morro de Santa Anna in the 1750s. In fact, Francisco was patronized by a slave owner named João da Costa Baptista after Francisco had healed one of his slaves, Josefa Crioula. During this time, Francisco was a runaway slave. His legal owner was Bernardo de Christo who lived in São João del Rei. João da Costa took a practical view of Francisco’s healing activities, saying that his cures were effective because of the “virtue of the herbs” that he used. Most importantly, Costa did not consider these healing practices sinful. Among Francisco’s customers was Captain-Major Manoel Botelho da Roza, who asked him to find out what was causing the death of various slaves in his household and his own sickness. Roza explicitly said that he wanted Francisco Angola’s help because he had already tried other medicine but the officially licensed doctors were unable to help him.¹³⁴

African healers and *calundu* ceremonies were sometimes the last resort of sick people who had already tried everything else. In 1790 in Mariana, a young woman named Joaquina Maria da Conceição came to confess how she had used the services of various magical healers. Suffering greatly, she had first sought the assistance of officially licensed surgeons who applied many medicines without any effect. The surgeons then suggested that Joaquina’s illness was

¹³² AEAM, Devassas Eclesiásticas, Livro 1733 (1/2), ff. 91v, 93v, 99-99v. According to Souza 1986, p. 168, Captain Manuel de Oliveira da Silva was reprimanded during an Episcopal visit for using the services of a healer to cure the sickness of one of his slaves.

¹³³ Souza 1986, p. 71.

¹³⁴ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 121, f. 213.

caused by *feitiços*. Two white men then told her that they knew black healers who could help. The first man, João da Mota, called the healer he knew to his house. Using a small pumpkin filled with water into which he dropped pieces of plants, making the sign of the cross and speaking words that Joaquina did not understand, the man divined that her illness was indeed caused by witchcraft. However, he did not proceed to cure her. On another occasion, Joaquina went to Manoel Cardozo's house, who had invited another healer to help her. By using a similar ritual as the previous black diviner, the second healer said that Joaquina had *feitiços* that had to be cured. In the healing ritual, the healer made the sign of the cross and spoke non-Portuguese sentences. Joaquina received a number of roots that she took but these medicines had no effect. The people who witnessed this ritual, including Joaquina's siblings, told her that she should not give credit to these practices, and Joaquina also said that these superstitions were a diabolical thing.

Joaquina then went to a white folk healer named Antonio de Sabina, who tied a string on her wrist and attached a pouch to the string. Reciting various prayers, Antonio ordered her to take an herbal bath and gave her other herbal remedies, all of which were blessed by a Franciscan father named Manoel do Livramento. These remedies, however, still failed to work on Joaquina, who then went to another folk healer named Mathis Carneiro. This man performed various divination rituals and blessed Joaquina. He also employed a possession ritual, acting as if dead, and saying that he went to heaven where he found three sentences against Joaquina. Finally, Joaquina said that she had twice gone to "*calundu* dances", where "the blacks pretended that they died, and started to speak in delicate voices, saying that it was the Devil speaking". This *calundu* clearly had Central African leadership, as Joaquina first named two Benguela women, Maria and Thereza. She also named four other women slaves and said that the slaves of Sergeant-Major Antonio Machado Costa watched the ritual. White women who came to see the *calundu* included Joaquina's sister Anna, the sergeant-major's daughter Antonia, and another two named Anna Pires and Anna Maria.¹³⁵

It is not surprising that white people visited African healers and accepted their knowledge in spiritual matters as valid. Many of the African ceremonies and rituals were congruent with Portuguese religious values, although the African languages spoken and the music played at *calundus* were strange. According to Ramos, many of the central beliefs expounded by Africans were not unfamiliar to the Portuguese colonists in Minas Gerais, and many of them could be found in all corners of Portugal. If the Portuguese so openly accepted an African set of values, it can partly be explained by the great

¹³⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 6680, ff. 5-5v.

variety of ways in which people comprehended Catholic doctrine. It was not uncommon that people did not understand concepts such as salvation of the soul or the Holy Trinity.¹³⁶ Further, as Joaquina's search for a remedy makes clear, on a structural and symbolic level there was little difference between black and white healers. Both addressed otherworldly spiritual powers in order to make their cures work, and the actual medicine that they used was more or less the same, at least from their client's perspective, who only saw that the healers used various herbs and roots.

In Portugal, healers of African origin were surrounded by a mystique that benefited their commerce in folk remedies. According to Walker, "[m]any whites accorded black healers respect and power based on their singular exoticism, assuming that their origins in Africa or Brazil had provided them with healing knowledge to which white *médicos* or *curandeiros* did not have access." Walker has claimed that the popular esteem given to black women as healers was perhaps partly attributable to enduring folk tales of mysterious *mouras encantadas* (enchanted Moorish women). In the popular stories, beautiful dark women from Africa were said to entrance or seduce lone travelers in the Portuguese countryside. According to popular belief, they had been left behind to guard treasures hidden by retreating Muslims. Moreover, it was commonly believed that such women had uncommon powers to charm and to heal Christians.¹³⁷ Perhaps overstating the case, Walker seems to assume that black African women shared the same mystique as *mouras encantadas*, but it is more likely that black healers from Sub-Saharan Africa enjoyed a mystique of their own, not to be confused with considerably lighter skinned North Africans, a distinction that was obvious to people in the Iberian world of the eighteenth century.

Another reason for the widespread acceptance of African healing practices among the Portuguese would have been the attitude of religious tolerance. As Shwartz has convincingly shown, this attitude was much more common in the Iberian Atlantic world than has been generally assumed. In a way, this attitude was contradictory in a society where religious values were scrupulously controlled and monitored by the Inquisition, but it is not so surprising when bearing in mind that learned opinions on religious issues were not always necessarily shared by the population at large. In the case of Brazil, Schwartz has more specifically argued that the spread of African practices was based on their perceived effectiveness, and also on their parallels with the group of beliefs in sympathetic magic that were widely held in Portugal itself. Whereas Catholic authorities imposed the framework of sorcery, witchcraft and superstition on

¹³⁶ Ramos 1999, pp. 145-146.

¹³⁷ Walker 2005, p. 84.

these practices, many people were convinced of their effectiveness and at least unsure that they were, in fact, evil or wrong.¹³⁸ According to Schwartz,

”[t]hat insecurity created an atmosphere of tolerance in the sense that these alternate approaches might be joined to, or even replace, the orthodoxy of the Church, and people resisted attempts by Church authorities to impose orthodoxy. The colony was rife with heterodox opinion, supposed superstitions, and critiques of religious authority, especially of the Inquisition. Some clerics believed that the New Christian attitudes that had been in the colony since its beginnings prepared the religious soil for the weeds of heresy.”¹³⁹

According to Almeida, official medical practice in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century was the domain of white men, who served the population as licensed surgeons and pharmacists. Blacks, both African and Brazilian born, did gain licenses to the office of bleeder, and black and colored women, *crioulas* and *pardas forras*, practiced as official midwives. The occupation of medical doctors was characterized by intense physical mobility, both within the *capitania* in search of patients, but also within Brazil and in the wider Portuguese colonial world, in search of professional and social ascension. Official therapeutic practices shared the same space with unofficial healing practices. In practical terms, they also shared a variety of medicinal plants, which were prescribed both by surgeons and popular healers to their patients.¹⁴⁰ For example, in Luis Gomes Ferreira’s celebrated medical treatise *Erário Mineral* that appeared in 1735 in Lisbon but reflected the author’s medical experience in Minas Gerais, the use of the *butua* (*abuta grandifolia*) plant together with other components was a suggested remedy for many illnesses.¹⁴¹

In medical practices, colonial Minas Gerais differed little from Spanish America. In seventeenth-century Peru, for example, licensed physicians and surgeons were vastly outnumbered by popular healers. Newson and Minchin have observed “that in the absence or ineffectiveness of medical care provided by the secular authorities people from all walks of life resorted to the use of various types of *curanderos*, many of whom were Africans or mulattoes.”¹⁴² Similarly in Mexico, magical healers were frequented not only by Africans, but elite and plebeian Spaniards also went to black and indigenous healers for help with physical and psychic problems. Bristol had argued that, regardless of caste, consultations with indigenous and Afro-Mexican popular healers were routine events for colonial residents who were more concerned about recovering

¹³⁸ Schwartz 2008, pp. 200-201.

¹³⁹ Schwartz 2008, p. 201.

¹⁴⁰ Almeida 2010, pp. 23-31, 81-97. On pharmacists in *mineiro* society, see also Figueiredo 2005.

¹⁴¹ Ferreira 1735.

¹⁴² Newson and Minchin 2007, p. 250.

their health than the Crown's and Inquisition's definitions of acceptable curing techniques. One Spanish constable who had been treated by a mulatta woman summed up this attitude by telling the Inquisitors "that to have health there was nothing that he wouldn't take."¹⁴³

Healers were in a relatively powerful position and demanded respect from their customers. Luzia Pinta demanded that people, who came for her services, kneel before her.¹⁴⁴ Besides being esteemed members of the black community, healers could earn a good living by performing their rituals. Witnesses against Pai Caetano mentioned that he received gold payments (*ouro lavrado*) and other gifts from people who believed in him, although his cures and divinations did not always work.¹⁴⁵ In 1753 a Kongolese slave named Maria Conga earned gold for performing ritual divination. Maria Conga, probably a *nganga* from Kongo, performed a *batuque* dance during which "something began to leave her head, which was called wind, and she began to divine that which she desired."¹⁴⁶

Although ecclesiastics mostly criticized the practices of African healers and diviners in colonial Brazil, in some cases even they were willing to admit the power of the African spirit world. According to Sweet, in Bahia in the late 1730s, several slave masters took their ailing slaves to a Carmelite priest named Luís da Nazaret, hoping that he would exorcise the demons that were making their slaves ill. He examined the slaves and determined that they were affected by *calundus*. However, he then claimed that exorcism was ineffective against these ailments "because they were a diabolical thing", and said that only African healers were able to remedy the *calundus*, thus acknowledging that the Church's most powerful weapon against witchcraft, exorcism, was powerless against the strength of "diabolical" African spirits.¹⁴⁷

A revealing case from Minas Gerais occurred in 1758 in Vila Rica, where a black *forro* named Domingos da Silva was first sentenced to a prison term in the city jail after a denunciation in a *devassa*, but then the *Juizo Eclesiástico* (ecclesiastic court) annulled his sentence. Domingos had been jailed because he had deciphered the nature of his clients' illness by using *calundus*, and then ordered herbal and purgative remedies, as well as baths. Domingos said to some

¹⁴³ Bristol 2007, pp. 149-150, 162. The popularity of black healers among whites in Spanish America is in stark contrast with the British West Indies, where most Europeans dismissed African medicine as mere superstition and its practitioners as charlatans. However, even in the West Indies a number of doctors took an interest in herbal remedies and documented their use among black healers. See Sheridan 1985, pp. 80-82; Hollsten 2006, pp. 162-163.

¹⁴⁴ Souza 1986, p. 169.

¹⁴⁵ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 6-7, 11v-12. The witness João dos Reis reported that on one occasion Caetano had been forced to return the gold he had received from the wife of José Alves Porto because the cure did not work.

¹⁴⁶ Souza 1986, p. 266. Transcribed as Maria Conga by Nogueira 2007b.

¹⁴⁷ Sweet 2003, pp. 145-146.

of his clients that certain illnesses caused by witchcraft were so resilient that they could not be cured by surgeons. Nogueira believes that this was also the opinion of Domingos' former owner, who was a surgeon and whose teachings Domingos had appropriated, and which had enabled him to buy his freedom. Perhaps Domingos' connections with white men who possessed "official" medical knowledge had a positive influence on the ecclesiastical judges.¹⁴⁸

White people participated in African rituals but seldom wanted to confess their participation to ecclesiastical authorities. Instead, when giving testimonies in the *devassas* they often claimed that the activities of Africans were "public and notorious" in the village. Whites also displayed a certain indifference to African healers, as is well attested in the case of Luzia Pinta. Some of the witnesses had known Luzia Pinta as a *feiticeira* at least for four years. When the Inquisition pressed for information, it was found that many white people had seen Luzia in action. The Portuguese merchant Antônio Leite Guimarães said that he had accepted Luzia's invitation to her house to cure an illness caused by witchcraft, because "the [white] medics and surgeons did not cure him". The most important individual who "consulted" Luzia about an illness was Baltazar de Morais Sarmento, *ouvidor* of the *comarca* of Rio das Velhas, who on another occasion also took his daughters for a "consultation". One witness, another Portuguese man, disclosed that Luzia was publicly known as a *calanduzeira*, diviner and healer, and as such was sought after by many people to cure their ailments. She operated not only in Sabará, but was also called to Caeté to use her healing powers. Perhaps the involvement of such high-profile members of society as Baltazar de Morais Sarmento explains why local authorities in Minas Gerais were reluctant to take official action against healers such as Luzia. For example, Father José de Sousa Carvalho knew of Luzia's activities for more than two years without taking any action.¹⁴⁹

Indifference also contributed to the length of Pai Caetano's career in Vila Rica. Manoel de Magalhães Gomes confessed to knowing of Pai Caetano's reputation around nine years before his arrest.¹⁵⁰ Captain Luis Pinto da Fonseca Ribeiro had known of Pai Caetano for "eight or 10 years" and had always heard the epithets "*feiticeiro*" and "*calanduzeiro*" in conjunction with his name. He also revealed that Caetano had organized his "dances" in remote parts to avoid attention.¹⁵¹ However, Caetano had become less careful before his arrest. One witness revealed that Caetano, who had lived in the same neighborhood for three years, organized *calundus* in his house where various men and women were admitted. The sound of drums could often be heard from the house during

¹⁴⁸ Nogueira 2007a.

¹⁴⁹ Ramos 1999, pp. 147-148, 151.

¹⁵⁰ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 4v.

¹⁵¹ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 6-6v.

the night.¹⁵² Captain Antonio Vieira da Cruz stated that one night a *crioula* named Felicia had heard how several men and women assembled in Caetano's house, turned off the lights and began to play some musical instruments. They made a "funerary noise", and a voice said "rise up", to which another responded "I cannot because my legs are dead". Felicia, who observed the proceedings through a window, was horror-stricken and expelled Caetano from her house. Caetano moved to another house along the same street but was soon expelled again. He moved to some houses along the Caminho Novo, but Captain Cruz drove him away. Perhaps with the intention of trying to avoid a criminal proceeding, Caetano rented a house from Father José Francisco Ferreira de Noronha. But this inevitably failed as well, because Caetano was finally arrested for organizing *calundus*.¹⁵³

Thus, it can be seen that African healing practices were maintained in Brazilian society right under the very noses of white slave-owners and sometimes even gained their outright approval. This gave Africans a taste of power that they would perhaps have lacked otherwise.¹⁵⁴ It is important to note that, in the popular imagination, even within the slave community, African religious practices such as witchcraft were usually connected to Central African slaves. It was also claimed that, in Rio de Janeiro, slaves from Angola continued to practice burial rituals that resembled the *entambes* of Luanda. This led the slaves from the Mina Coast, who were members of the Brotherhood of Santo Elesbão and Santa Efigênia, to name Angolas and Benguelas as "bad company", because they were involved in "paganism and superstition".¹⁵⁵

In Minas Gerais, there are indications that some of the African religious specialists gained a significant cult following among blacks. Francisco Angola, who also counted many white people among his patients, was visited by great quantities of black men and women. The reason for their visit was that he would give them protective magic so that they could not be harmed by witchcraft. Francisco's method was making four cuts, two in the hands and two in the legs, from which he drew blood. Before making the cuts, he gave people a narcotic drink, so that they left after this treatment stumbling around like drunks.¹⁵⁶

Although not acknowledged by white witnesses, the meanings of Francisco's ritual could have been multifaceted. Perhaps making the cuts was truly thought to have protective qualities and Francisco's charisma was

¹⁵² CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 7v, testimony of João Lopes da Cruz.

¹⁵³ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, ff. 5v-6.

¹⁵⁴ Ramos 1999, p. 149.

¹⁵⁵ Soares 2000, p. 206, 216-217. The document analyzed by Soares and authored by members of the Mina elite might, however, reflect ethnic antagonism that played down similar practices within one's own ethnic community.

¹⁵⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 121, ff. 214-214v.

esteemed by the community of blacks. There are other possibilities as well. An added meaning to this ritual could have been that Francisco was marking his followers, and his followers were eager to be marked physically in order to show that they were part of his flock. It is also conceivable that besides making the said cuts, Francisco rubbed a medicine into the cuts. This was a method sometimes used by healers in southern Africa. These cuts were taken by Scottish medical missionaries in Malawi as a sign that African converts had visited local traditional folk healers.¹⁵⁷ Francisco could also have been reproducing a Central African ancestral practice in Minas Gerais. In the 1720s in Angola, a woman named Mariana Fernandes was accused of magical practices and of using the services of a healer to cure her son. Various witnesses said that Mariana had scarification marks on her arms, legs, and above her chest. The Catholic point of view was that such marks were a sign that the person had made a pact with the Devil. When examined, scarification marks were found in the aforementioned places on Mariana's body, but Mariana explained that these tribal marks were made on children when they were young.¹⁵⁸ It is possible that Francisco was giving people tribal marks and that select slaves were in this way enforcing their group identity within *mineiro* society.

6.3 Divination

Divination was an ingrained part of Central African cosmologies and one of the most common ways through which people sought to explain the world around them. The basic element in divination was communication between the world of the living and the world of the spirits. Diviners mediated between these two worlds, explaining the past and predicting future events, uncovering the guilt or innocence of suspected criminals, and determining the cause of illness or other misfortunes. In Africa, diviners determined the causes of social division in society, and left the restoration of balance and harmony to others, particularly the elders. Although the spirit world revealed certain truths to the diviner, he or she did not pass judgment on the revelation, rather it was interpreted by the whole community. The office of diviner was generally a conservative social phenomenon that reinforced public opinion and a broader sense of morality. According to Sweet, the diviner acted as the fulcrum for a balanced and peaceful

¹⁵⁷ Markku Hokkanen, personal communication, 4.5.2011.

¹⁵⁸ ANTT, TSO/IL, Processo 5888, ff. 30v, 37v, 51v, 1v (numeration restarts from 1 in the middle of the *processo*).

society, but the diviner's findings were never completely sacrosanct, in that they required affirmation and interpretation from the wider society.¹⁵⁹

In Brazil, slaves also sought a spiritual explanation for enslavement and the brutalities connected to the institution of slavery. In slave communities, the diviners' role was to forge the same types of communal balance that diviners had helped create in their homelands. However, masters also recognized the widespread embrace of divination among slaves and often used their African slaves to divine who had stolen a particular object, who had "bewitched" whom or to reveal the whereabouts of runaway slaves. Divination rituals were accepted as valid within the slave community, even though peoples of African descent were often implicated. Masters embraced the institution of divination as a way of punishing those who rebelled against slavery, as well as a way of mediating social unrest. African diviners were ultimately in control of the outcome of the divination and they were accountable to the slave community. In some instances, Africans were able to take control of social and judicial inquiries that directly impacted on the slave community.¹⁶⁰

This was the case on an occasion when Luzia Pinta was called to divine who had stolen money from a certain slave owner. Luzia found that two female slaves were the thieves, but she also revealed that one of the women was apparently owed the money. The master had slept with the slave woman without paying for her services, and the woman decided to take matters into her own hands and steal the money.¹⁶¹ African diviners were often drawn to the center of disputes between masters and slaves or even masters and masters. A miner, Manuel Luís Pereira, made the accusation that a black named Manuel Jaquere, a slave owned by Alexandre Martins Guedes, had "infected" his gold mine with witchcraft because it had suddenly run dry. To Pereira's rescue had come another black named Gaspar Angola, resident in the parish of São Caetano in Águas Claras, who "used his powers to alleviate" the effects of witchcraft and who made gold appear again. Gaspar was later called by the *licenciado* Paulo Rodrigues Pereira, *boticário* (pharmacist) and *familiar* (agent) of the Inquisition in Mariana, to his farm in the village of Sumidouro to cure the many illnesses that ailed his slaves. Gaspar attributed the illnesses to the powers of a slave named João Angola.¹⁶²

One of the African divination rituals that were widespread in Brazil was the *jaji* ceremony, in which a rock was laid in a pan of water and when the water was boiling, people were told to remove the rock from the water with their bare hands. If innocent, they could put their hand in the water without fear of

¹⁵⁹ Sweet 2003, pp. 119-120.

¹⁶⁰ Sweet 2003, p. 120.

¹⁶¹ Sweet 2003, p. 135.

¹⁶² Ramos 1999, p. 151.

being scalded. Sweet has shown that this religious/judicial practice made its way across the Atlantic in an almost unchanged structural form. Although African rituals and practices conformed to new social conventions in the Americas, just as they had done when changes occurred in Africa, the rituals themselves remained essentially the same. Distinctly Central African practices continued even if adaptations were made to meet the needs of the slave society.¹⁶³

Africans who came to Brazil from different parts of the continent practiced distinct forms of divination based on very specific cultural resonances. However, many rituals resembled one another and transcended ethnic groups and wide geographic spaces in Africa. Even if the nature of ceremonies varied widely among different African ethnic groups, almost all of them shared a broad understanding of the meanings of the divination. The process of creolization among Africans from various ethnic backgrounds was probably facilitated by similar rituals that were widely practiced, and in this process, a distinctly “African” form of slave culture was created. According to Sweet, the Central African ordeal of *jaji* was practised in identical form in Dahomey during its early history. Rather than pulling a rock out of the boiling water, in Dahomey a “seed”, which was also used in playing a game called *adjí*, had to be removed from boiling water. In Dahomey, this ordeal was called *amizoka*. It is clear that, in eighteenth-century Brazil, West and West Central African slaves shared certain beliefs on the meanings and significance of divination.¹⁶⁴

Sweet has also discovered that perhaps the most widespread “Angolan” divination ritual was the *quibando*, which was not even of African origin, let alone Angolan. The term *quibando* comes from the Kimbundu word *kibandu*, meaning “sieve”. It became known in the African-Portuguese Diaspora in the late seventeenth century but had its origins in Europe at least as far back as the sixteenth century. In sixteenth-century England, the ritual was carried out by sticking a pair of shears on the edge of a sieve and letting two persons place the tips of their forefingers on the upper part of the shears. The sieve was lifted steadily up from the ground and the persons were asked whether someone or another had stolen the lost article. At the naming of the guilty person, the sieve rotated. The ritual was most commonly called “the scissor and sieve” divination. In Brazil, the Portuguese imposed an Angolan identity on the age-old European ritual. In Portuguese the ritual was called *peneira* (sieve), but in Brazil, Angola, and even Goa the Portuguese used the Kimbundu term to refer to a European ritual. In the *quibando* cases examined by Sweet, slaves were always the guilty party and, unlike in cases of African divination, whites almost always conducted the *quibando* ritual. The Portuguese gave the scissor and sieve divination an African veneer probably because it fitted well with the

¹⁶³ Sweet 2003, p. 123.

¹⁶⁴ Sweet 2003, p. 131.

widely accepted idiom of “dangerous” and “exotic” African divination rituals, all of which were considered “diabolical” or “superstitious”.¹⁶⁵

In Minas Gerais, African diviners usually relied on rituals that resonated clearly with their ancestral background. Healer-diviner Mateus of the Monjolo “nation”, whose owner was Lieutenant José da Silva, was called to various places to heal people and to divine by reading shells whether “witchcraft or similar things” were causing diseases. Mateus paid a fee (*jornal*) for the days he was away from his master, revealing that he earned a living from his activities and probably that his owner was aware that Mateus was a diviner.¹⁶⁶ Central African notions of the spirit world are obvious in Mateus’ use of shells. Seashells were associated with the water spirits. Among the Kongo, as confirmed by modern ethnographic literature, shells of the spiriform kind have been used in charms. MacGaffey has argued that one expression for the otherworld in Kikongo is *kutwazingila*, translated as “where we shall live”, but *zinga* also has the meaning “to endure” and “to move in a spiral path”. According to him, “[t]he use of shells in charms is based on this association, certain shells being both spiriform and enduring objects that were formerly ‘alive.’” Kongo traditions attest that people in the old days hid their souls in large sea-shells called *mbamba* to protect them and ensure their perdurance in the afterlife.¹⁶⁷

Divination did not always mean a communal trial or ordeal. Often, diviners sought to reveal and uncover the cause of individual misfortune. In Conceição do Mato Dentro in Minas Gerais, a slave named José Mina revealed people’s illnesses and their causes in a ritual, in which he placed a plate filled with water on the ground with a knife buried under it. Asking questions, a voice that resembled the squeaking of a bat answered from the plate.¹⁶⁸ This ritual can be directly traced to West African forms of divination. Different kinds of water ceremony were prevalent on the Mina Coast of West Africa, and it was believed that spirits could be invoked to enter water and proffer divinatory messages.¹⁶⁹

Divination using water was not unfamiliar to Central African diviners either. By using this practice, the industrious healer-diviner Francisco Angola revealed the identity of the witch who was thought to have caused Josefa Crioula’s illness. Josefa herself had seen the face of a *mulata* widow named Maria de Espírito Santo reflected in the bucket of water into which Francisco had asked her to look. The said *mulata* lived in the same household as Josefa, who claimed that she saw the *mulata*’s face clearly in the water.¹⁷⁰ In this case,

¹⁶⁵ Sweet 2003, pp. 127-128.

¹⁶⁶ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Z-6 (1753), f. 80.

¹⁶⁷ MacGaffey 1986, p. 77.

¹⁶⁸ AEAM, *Devassas Eclesiásticas*, Livro 1734, ff. 112v-112, 126-129. See also Souza 1986, p. 166.

¹⁶⁹ Sweet 2003, pp. 129-130.

¹⁷⁰ ANTT, TSO/IL, *Caderno do Promotor*, No. 121, f. 213.

it is worth bearing in mind that, in Central Africa, bodies of water were thought to be border zones that separated the world of the living and the dead. For Francisco Angola's divination purposes, water could have been a window to the world of the spirits.

Besides helping locate witches thought to be responsible for causing illnesses, diviners were also known for their powers in redeeming lost objects. They were generally in great demand among colored and white people alike. For example, one of Pai Caetano's customers, an unidentified *pardo* man, asked Caetano to divine the whereabouts of his domestic animal that had disappeared.¹⁷¹ In another case from Conceição do Rio Verde in southern Minas Gerais, a slave named Antonio Angola was accused in 1781 of healing *feitiços*, and divination. Antonio had recently been called to divine the whereabouts of a stolen gun. He divined that the gun had been taken by a man named João Martins Pinto, in whose house it was found after a search. Antonio's method of divination is worth noting. It was said that he divined through a mirror, which he carried, and that he also used a cross in his rituals.¹⁷² This would point to a high degree of syncretism in Antonio's divination practice but it is unclear where he could have picked it up. The mirror and the cross were probably used in conjunction so that the mirror would have revealed the culprit to the diviner. A similar method was used in medieval France, but Souza did not find it in Brazil in her study of popular religion.¹⁷³ However, there is a clear analogy with the method Francisco Angola used. Whereas a bucket of water could have served as a window to the spirit world for Francisco, similarly Antonio could have contacted the spirits by using a mirror.¹⁷⁴ Despite using a syncretistic divination practice, Antonio insisted on calling himself by the name Antonio Calundu. It is possible that healing through spirit possession was his main venture, as the denunciation ended with the note that "lots of people run to consult the said diviner and healer."¹⁷⁵

Another Central African diviner whose methods included spirit possession was a man named Domingos Congo, who was denounced in Barra Longa in the same year as Antonio Calundu. The rituals organized by Domingos took place in a house behind closed doors. People who had been present at these rituals told that, at the beginning of the ceremony, Domingos sang and played a shaker. The sound of another shaker was heard from above and a voice said "I go, I go", to which Domingos responded, "Come, come." The voice then said, "Praised be Christ, and God be my godfather." Domingos proceeded to

¹⁷¹ CP, Códice 449, Auto 9470, f. 10v.

¹⁷² ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 130, ff. 369-369v.

¹⁷³ Souza 1986, p. 163, n. 21.

¹⁷⁴ The use of mirrors for divination purposes is the central element in Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's novel *Wizard of the Crow*.

¹⁷⁵ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 130, ff. 369-369v.

make various divinations and he danced until he fell on the ground as if dead. When he came back to his senses, he recommended that no one present mention the holy name of Jesus.¹⁷⁶ Domingos' *calundu* ceremony shows vividly how a Central African spirit possession ritual changed when it came into contact with Catholicism. At the beginning of the ritual, Domingos made it appear as if it were sanctified by Christ and God.

An important category of shared divination beliefs among both West and West Central Africans was augury, or divination through omens. In Central Africa, omens included the barking of dogs, the singing of birds at night, a cock-crow outside of the normal hour, a bee flying around somebody, and the flight of crows overhead. Among the Ewe-speaking peoples of the Mina Coast, people regarded many of the same signs as omens as the people in Central Africa. According to Sweet, many Africans, despite being separated by thousands of kilometers on the African continent, shared certain broad religious understandings. The aims of divination were consistently the same with diviners restoring temporal balance through spiritual intervention. Although language and social structures were sometimes obstacles in the early creation of a cohesive slave community, religion served as a common idiom for a variety of African peoples. People could communicate across these boundaries, although the general tendency was to gravitate toward those who came from the same ethnic group or enslavement zone. However, spiritual affinities probably facilitated a process of "Africanization" among various ethnic groups.¹⁷⁷

An example of how this process affected Central Africans was given by Francisco Benguela, a freedman, who came to confess his participation in illicit rituals in 1772 in Mariana. Francisco related how he had on an occasion been in the village of São Sebastião and heard through the grapevine that blacks were giving a *batuque* or a feast outside the village. To satisfy his curiosity, Francisco went to see the dances, which were led by a diviner named Felix Cabo Verde. According to Francisco's testimony, Felix was making a *calundu* ceremony that closely resembled Central African spirit possession rituals. Felix was, in fact, assisted by a woman named Maria Angola, who "collapsed like she was dead and spoke" as if possessed by the spirits. Felix said that "the souls of the coast of Guiné were speaking inside that creature". The diviner also asked Francisco if he felt any pain in his body, and when Francisco responded in the affirmative, Felix told him that it was caused by the "souls of the coast". After a few days, Francisco returned to Felix who proceeded to cure him. However, Francisco lost his conscience during the ritual. Later he repented his participation. Felix,

¹⁷⁶ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 130, f. 356.

¹⁷⁷ Sweet 2003, pp. 131-132.

on the contrary, was arrested by civil authorities and sent to Goiás. Before this, however, he had taught various divination methods to others.¹⁷⁸

In this case, the convergence of magico-religious beliefs and practices from different African regions was evident. Spirit possession rituals in Cabo Verde were described, for example, by the Jesuit Father Baltasar Barreira in 1605,¹⁷⁹ and they were prevalent in Central Africa as well. Although Felix seems to have acted as the ritual's leader, he was closely assisted by a woman from Angola. Francisco Benguela was clearly familiar with these practices before his enslavement, and it seems that his attendance in the *calundu* was not motivated merely by his curiosity, although in his confession he clearly downplayed the fact that he had gone to the ceremony to seek treatment for an actual sore that was bothering him. Besides the obvious familiarity of these rituals to Africans from different regions, the reason why Felix's divination practice must have been so popular was that, rather than saying that he invoked spirits from a specific place, he was said to invoke the spirits of the coast of Guiné. This was a key sentence that made Felix's *calundus* so attractive to Africans. In the eighteenth century, the term Guiné in the Portuguese colonial world could be taken to mean almost the whole of the western coast of Africa, from Senegambia to Angola.¹⁸⁰ The Portuguese certainly referred to different African regions by their appropriate names, but in the sixteenth century, Brazilians were generically requesting "slaves from Guiné" or from any part of the western coast of Africa.¹⁸¹ Instead of calling on specific spirits from his ancestral home, Cabo Verde, Felix was appealing to ancestral spirits that resided in the various homelands of all enslaved Africans who were brought to Minas Gerais. In this way, he made his divination ritual accessible to all African slaves, including those from West Central Africa.

6.4 Conclusion

In eighteenth-century Minas Gerais, the term *calundu* came to denote any sort of magic practised by Africans. Despite its Bantu origin and the significance it held for slaves from Central Africa, the witnesses in the *devassas eclesiásticas* used it as a general term to denote the ritual practices of African "sorcerers", whether they were healers or diviners or both. Thus, *calundu* was employed to signify diverse African ceremonies and ritual practices of different origins.

¹⁷⁸ ANTT, TSO/IL, Caderno do Promotor, No. 129, ff. 143-143v.

¹⁷⁹ See Lovejoy 2000, p. 44.

¹⁸⁰ Bluteau 1712-1728, vol. 4, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸¹ For the evolution of the term Guiné in Portuguese use from the fifteenth century, see Soares 2000, pp. 41-55.

However, it should not be assumed that Africans forgot and rejected their native practices only because there was a general term to signify African magic practices in Brazil. Rather, it is a sign that the nuances of these practices were not known to the white people who were witnesses during ecclesiastical visits. Although Sweet has argued that creolization in Brazil was most salient between Central Africans and West Africans, and not between Africans and Portuguese,¹⁸² it must be acknowledged that Portuguese masters shared many similar assumptions about spiritual matters with their African slaves. Even if not necessarily employing the services of African healers and diviners to heal their own infirmities, white masters were often willing to let their slaves be treated by African specialists.

In ignoring the African background of healing practices in Minas Gerais, Souza has assumed that a high degree of syncretism was a special characteristic of Brazilian colonial society.¹⁸³ However, syncretistic tendencies which were obvious in Angola and Congo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were continued by Central Africans in Minas Gerais. To say that syncretism between African religions and Catholicism was a phenomenon peculiar to colonial Brazil is to ignore a significant chapter of African history. It should rather be argued that syncretistic practices in which West Central Africans were involved in Minas Gerais represent a continuation in Brazil of processes that had been going on in Congo and Angola since the end of the fifteenth century.

¹⁸² Sweet 2003, pp. 116-117.

¹⁸³ Souza 1986.

7 Conclusion

This is the first book length study to deal exclusively with Central Africans in the mining region of Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. The study contends that, in order to understand how Central Africans recreated their identity in the colonial Brazilian slave society, it is necessary to study them in their home societies. For West Central Africa, this is best accomplished through the study of the abundant written historical documents that describe the region and its peoples. The documentary record on colonial Minas Gerais is extremely rich and well-preserved. This study merely scratches the surface of what can be accomplished through an in-depth examination of these sources.

The data on the numbers of Africans taken to the Americas are now accessible in the new Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD), and these have been employed to discuss the importance of different African regions to Brazilian slave traders. According to the documented data on slave imports, the number of enslaved Central Africans that reached Brazil during the eighteenth century was 665,626 individuals, accounting for half of the total number of all Africans. The estimates provided by the TSTD raise this number to 1,234,900, or 62% of the estimated total. It is obvious that the demographic impact of Central African slave imports was significant for the formation of Brazilian colonial society. Only the exporting region of the Bight of Benin could compete in demographic terms with West Central Africa.

Luanda and Benguela were the foremost slaving ports in West Central Africa in the era of the Atlantic slave trade. Luanda was always the major port and, in the seventeenth century, slaves from Benguela were first exported to Luanda before being taken to Brazil. Around 1716, direct exports from Benguela commenced and grew in importance through the eighteenth century, in the final decades of which slave exports from Benguela did not lag far behind those from Luanda. In Minas Gerais, this was seen in the increase of Central Africans identified as Benguelas. Although gender ratio evidence on slaving voyages from West Central Africa is sparse, it is likely that male slaves accounted for over 70% of the exported individuals, a proportion somewhat higher than other exporting regions. The continuous growth of slave exports during the eighteenth century could only be maintained through systematic violence and widespread enslavement of people. In practice, this meant that almost anyone could be enslaved.

The slave population that was transferred to Minas Gerais came

almost exclusively from two coastal ports, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro. These ports demonstrated different trajectories and established different commercial networks in the southern Atlantic world. Whereas Bahian merchants had close ties with West Africa, importing the majority (61%) of their slaves from the Bight of Benin, or the Mina Coast, as it was called by the Portuguese, Cariocan merchants from Rio de Janeiro brought almost 95% of their slaves from West Central Africa. The documented trade between Bahia and Africa (748,281 individuals) was over twice the size of that between Rio de Janeiro and Africa (301,951), but according to estimates, Rio de Janeiro lagged behind only by approximately 60,000 slaves imported during the whole of the eighteenth century.

The different commercial connections of these Brazilian ports directly influenced the makeup of the African population in Minas Gerais. The regional origins of Africans in the mining regions fluctuated over time and space. From a chronological perspective, West Africans mainly from the Bight of Benin dominated the slave population of Minas Gerais until the 1730s, while Bahian slave traders had the advantage over Cariocan merchants. Until 1750, slave imports from Africa to Bahia far surpassed those to Rio de Janeiro, but in the second half of the century, the tables were turned as recession hit Bahia. Rio de Janeiro became the capital of colonial Brazil in 1763, and Salvador lost not only in economic but also in political power. Reflecting the strengthening connections between Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais from the 1740s, Central Africans came to constitute the majority of the African-born population in the captaincy. Geographic connections, however, still affected the spatial makeup of the slave population. Throughout the eighteenth century, the northern parts of Minas Gerais remained strongly connected to the trade routes to and from Bahia, meaning that West Africans continued to hold an important position in the diamond mining regions of Serro Frio. Similarly, the southern parts of Minas Gerais were more closely connected with Rio de Janeiro earlier than other parts of the captaincy. Consequently, from a demographic perspective, Central Africans were always more important in southern Minas Gerais than elsewhere.

Identities

In Brazilian slave society, Africans were identified by their regional origins through grouping them into “nations”. For the slave owners, *nação* or “nation” was first and foremost an instrument that helped them to identify their property. Along with a Christian first name, slaves were attributed to a “nation” according to the port or region from which they had begun their Atlantic crossing. The

names that are encountered in documentary sources such as João Angola, Maria Benguela, Francisco Congo, or Pedro Mina are a reflection of this practice. Even if Africans had other ways of identifying each other, this is not revealed by the documents. The written evidence, for the most part, also does not explain the significance of belonging to a certain African “nation”. However, in some notable cases it can be argued that African “nations” provided a key organizing principle for groups of slaves and freedmen. In Minas Gerais, the most revealing example was the case of the “Noble Nation of Benguela” that was organized within the rosary brotherhood of São João del Rei.

This study has sought to interpret what it meant to be an Angola, a Congo, or a Benguela in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. Whereas earlier scholarship has laid great store on explaining why specific African ethnic identities were not manifested more often in colonial Brazilian society, seeing African “nations” as expressions of the slave owners’ power in creating the identity of the enslaved, this study has sought to emphasize “nations” as regional identities that were not merely inventions of the whites but had great significance for the Africans themselves. Instead of seeing African “nations” as forming only when slaves arrived in the Americas, they were in fact starting to take shape as enslaved Africans were being marched to the coast to await shipment *as a group*. The sense of belonging in this new “nation” was definitely strengthened by the experience of the Middle Passage and, in Brazil, by meeting others who shared the same fate. Although friction certainly must have existed between individuals within the group, the surest way to find any cohesion was the eradication of differences springing from ethnic specificity. In practice, this meant that slaves had to find common denominators in language, religion, and cultural assumptions. For Central Africans, the mutually intelligible Bantu languages offered a linguistic way to unify as a “nation”. While Portuguese was the dominant language in master-slave relations, new slaves who were not yet fluent in Portuguese were helped by others with the same linguistic background.

After the import of Mina slaves decreased in proportion to Central Africans in the 1730s, Angola emerged as the most significant “nation” in Minas Gerais until about 1780. Angola signified slaves who embarked on the Middle Passage at Luanda. For the slaves, the term had various meanings. When referring to Angola, they could mean the “city of Angola” (Luanda), the Portuguese colony of Angola (the *Reino de Angola*), or more vaguely, the “backlands” (*sertão*) of Angola. In Minas Gerais, Angola was also used in the context of referring to the coast (*costa*) of Angola. In West Central Africa, coming from the city or from the Angolan backlands would have made a big difference, but what mattered more in Brazil was the shared fate of captivity. The formation of the Portuguese colony of Angola, no matter how loose Portuguese control was in this region, was important in creating a regional identity among

the people who lived in the colony. In Luanda and in Brazil, slaves who had lived in the city or within the colony came into contact with others from further inland who had marched through the region, observing the cultural landscape as it changed from areas with no Portuguese influence until reaching the coast in Luanda, where Portuguese control of the slave trade was most obvious. By the time they arrived in Brazil, the slaves knew exactly what it meant to be identified as Angolas.

Congo slaves present a dilemma in this scheme. Since they too were exported from Luanda, they should have belonged to the Angola “nation” in Brazil. As speakers of the Kikongo language, they were set apart from Angolas on linguistic grounds. At the same time, they must have been able to communicate a strong group identity that also convinced their masters that the Congos were a different flock from the Angolas. The formation of the Congo “nation” in Brazil is perhaps the most revealing example of slaves defining their identity instead of letting it be defined by their masters. Following the logic of the argument that slave owners accorded the slaves their identity depending upon the port from which they were exported, all Congos should have become Angolas in Brazil. However, this was not the case. By the time Congo slaves started arriving in Minas Gerais, they had been imported into Brazil for over a century at least, so defining the Congo “nation” was an established practice in Brazilian ports. The tricky question is, given that the kingdom of Kongo had to a large extent disintegrated during the civil wars of the seventeenth century, who was a Congo in the eighteenth century? It can be argued that people coming not only from the area of São Salvador, Kongo’s capital and the old heartland of the kingdom, but also people from the surrounding marquisates and duchies who continued to cherish the idea of the old kingdom, identified themselves as Congos in Brazil. Congo identity was manifested well into the nineteenth century in Minas Gerais, when there was actually a proportional increase in the slaves identified as Congos after 1840.

Benguela was the third major Central African regional identity in Minas Gerais. Proportionately, the Benguela “nation’s” presence was largest in the period from 1780 to 1840. Benguela identity was assumed much in the same way as Angola identity. However, in the colony of Benguela (the *Reino de Benguela*), Portuguese control was even more lax than in Angola. The sense of living inland in the *Reino de Benguela* did not affect Benguela slaves to the same extent that it affected those living in the *Reino de Angola*, at least not in the eighteenth century. It can be argued that, for Benguela slaves, regional identity was to a great extent formed by the experience of embarking on the Middle Passage from the port of Benguela. In Brazil, individuals coming from the central highlands and southern Angola had to ignore whatever political disagreements had existed in their homelands. In this way, they were able to

come together as the Benguela “nation” that offered them a sense of belonging, and provided protection and meaning.

What about all the other Central Africans who did not claim these broad regional identities but continued to be identified by more specific place names? Firstly, it must be noted that their numbers were minimal compared to the three major “nations”. Only a few of these “nations” appear in source materials with some regularity. This is the case with Rebolo, referring to slaves coming from Libolo; Cabinda, referring to a port in northern Angola; Ganguela, referring to people living on the western tributaries of upper Zambezi; Casange, a kingdom and an important slave market just outside the *Reino de Angola*; and Monjolo, referring to slaves coming from the kingdom of Tio. Secondly, the fact that they appear in the documentary evidence points to a two-way process of communication between slaves and their owners. At some point during their enslavement, transport, or sale these individuals found a way to express a self-ascribed identity tied to a specific geographical area. At the same time, their masters must have shown a keen interest in the origins of their slaves. Even if asserting a specific local identity can be seen as an act of maintaining a strong sense of belonging to a certain group within West Central Africa, it sometimes might have been an obstacle to forming bonds with those who assumed a wider regional identity and claimed membership of one of the larger African “nations”.

The stereotypes describing slaves imported from different African regions were an important aspect of the slave trade. However, these were more important for slave owners than for slaves themselves. In Minas Gerais, stereotypes functioned as a marketing mechanism early on. By stereotyping the physical qualities of West African slaves from the Mina Coast, Bahian traders succeeded in creating a greater demand for West Africans during the first decades of gold mining. West Africans were also reputed to be experienced gold miners, but it is questionable whether slaves who had dug gold in Africa were sold to Minas Gerais in massive numbers, as has often been suggested in the Brazilian historiography. Central Africans were not stereotyped negatively, but they were rather seen as more suited for domestic service and agricultural work, which began to appear as the *mineiro* economy diversified in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Other possible avenues to study identity formation among Central Africans in Minas Gerais include most notably family history, and reproduction of material culture. These themes have not been taken up in this study due to limited resources. Archival research in Brazil has been fruitful but extremely time consuming, with major hindrances to data collection being the limited opening hours of the archives, and restrictions on the digital reproduction of source materials. Marriage patterns and the makeup of slave families can be studied through post-mortem inventories, marriage records, and baptismal registers.

In a recent study based on ecclesiastical marriage records and concentrating on São José del Rei between 1743 and 1850, it was noted that Angolas and Benguelas demonstrated a greater degree of endogamous marriage within their own “nation” than Congos, Minas, and Rebolos. However, with regard to Minas, the conclusion is based on only six marriages involving Minas.¹ The concept of exogamy is also problematic. For example, there is a great difference between an Angola marrying a Congo or an individual identified as a Mina, although both are labeled as exogamic marriages. A similar critique can be applied to a study of slave marriages in Barbacena between 1781 and 1821. In the marriage registers, out of 488 African slaves who married other African slaves, only 26 came from West Africa. All other cases involved Central Africans marrying other Central Africans. In 229 cases, African slaves married Brazilian-born slaves.² Barbacena’s slave population in this period was clearly made up of Central Africans, reflecting the town’s location in southern Minas Gerais and closer proximity to Rio de Janeiro.

An important question that would merit future study is the role of Central Africans in the early gold mining activities of Minas Gerais. Although Angolas, Congos, and Benguelas were in the minority in most locations, it is likely that they were used in gold mining alongside West Africans and not confined to domestic and artisan duties as has been generally assumed. Studying this question would require a thorough analysis of testaments and property inventories, in which slaves’ work duties are often specified. It would be also interesting to see whether Central Africans were more often employed in activities that required a high degree of specialization, such as goldsmithing. Post-mortem inventories could also be used to study whether Mina slaves were in general valued as being more expensive.

Creolization and the Religious Universe in the Southern Atlantic

The second part of this study concentrates on the religious universe of West Central Africans. Heywood and Thornton have argued that processes of cultural creolization affected Central African societies after the Portuguese landed in the kingdom of Kongo in the late fifteenth century. This led to the development of an Atlantic Creole culture in the region. Creolization did not affect all areas equally but was most salient in Luanda and its hinterland, and in the kingdom of

¹ Graça Filho, Pinto and Malaquias 2007, pp. 205-206.

² Rangel 2006, p. 47. Rangel’s definition of endogamy is more embracing for she classifies “Bantu marrying Bantu” as endogamic and uses the concept of “macroregion” in her analysis instead of referring to ethnicity.

Kongo.³ Inland from Benguela, Atlantic Creole culture spread more slowly and really began only in the late eighteenth century.⁴ Besides leading to syncretism in the region's religious life, creolization affected language and cultural practices such as foodways, music, naming practices, and dress. Cultural exchange affected both parties, Portuguese and African, and it was not a process in which one party forced another to accept its values and ideas.

Processes of creolization were an integral part of cultural development in the Brazilian mining regions as well. In Brazilian historiography concerning Minas Gerais, most notably in the work of Eduardo França Paiva, these processes are analyzed by using the concept of *mestiçagem*, referring both to racial and cultural mixture.⁵ In this analysis, the southern Atlantic is seen as a culturally unified space. Central Africans landing in Brazil and arriving in Minas Gerais encountered many Portuguese cultural practices that were already familiar to them from their home societies. Their numerical presence also guaranteed that they made significant cultural contributions to the formation of *mineiro* society. Perhaps the most foreign thing that they encountered was other black Africans imported from regions that had no contact with Central Africa. These blacks spoke languages not understood by Bantu speakers and had their own ancestral traditions. Even if foreign to each other, at least in their religious life they shared many of the same assumptions on the spiritual world, providing the opportunity for cooperation in religious matters, as has been demonstrated in Chapters 5 and 6.

The spread of Catholicism in West Central Africa affected religious life especially in the kingdom of Kongo, in the city of Luanda, and in the *presídios* of the *Reino de Angola*. The adoption of Catholicism was most visible in the kingdom of Kongo, which retained its reputation as a Christian kingdom even after it disintegrated in the wake of the civil wars of the late seventeenth century. However, Catholicism did not spread to all parts of Kongo in equal measure but was most pronounced in São Salvador and its vicinity, while in distant rural areas there was minimal change in ritual life. This should not be surprising since the number of missionaries in Kongo and elsewhere in Central Africa was always low. In the *Reino de Angola*, many churches and chapels were for long without priests, and the buildings gradually crumbled, as the ecclesiastical reports from the late eighteenth century often attest. Even with a low missionary presence, Africans did adopt Catholic practices selectively. In the kingdom of Kongo and in the colony of Angola, African lay assistants helped to spread and sustain Atlantic Creole Christianity. There was a considerable market for Catholic paraphernalia, including saints' images and ceremonial

³ Heywood and Thornton 2007a.

⁴ Candido 2006.

⁵ Paiva 2001, 2008.

objects. These were often adored in syncretistic fashion in shrines alongside indigenous images of deities and figures representing ancestors.

The manifestations of an Atlantic Creole version of Catholicism in Angola and Kongo were regularly criticized by European clergy and Portuguese administrators, who commented that Africans often became Christians in name only, meaning that baptism did not automatically lead to an entire change of heart. Sweet has been the foremost critic of the idea that Central Africans can be labeled Christians, arguing that Catholicism did not replace traditional religious beliefs and practices, which constituted the core of Central Africans' spiritual identity.⁶ Sweet's view thus comes close to the perspective of the Inquisitors, who prosecuted Africans, although very rarely, for sorcery and superstition because, as in the case of Luzia Pinta, they openly practiced African healing rituals in syncretistic forms. Whereas Sweet's argument has concerned Central Africa, Hawthorne has argued along the same lines with reference to Upper Guinea. According to Hawthorne, Upper Guineans did not reject all things Christian but did not become "converts" either. Some incorporated Christian symbols to their own belief system much in the same way that was done in Central Africa, but this was not what was hoped for by the Catholic priests.⁷ However, it should be noted that with regard to Upper Guinea, Catholic missionary efforts were even more limited than in West Central Africa.

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that even in Portugal, both in urban and rural settings, people's understanding of Catholicism was limited to the extent that missions had to be sent all over the country to teach the rustics in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.⁸ It is contended that conversion should be seen as a gradual process, in which the new belief system does not automatically replace the old one, and that forms of religious expression develop over a long period of time. Individuals can also respond to the new religion differently, as they did in West Central Africa. While some adopted Catholicism open-heartedly, others ignored it completely, and most people probably accepted some elements and mixed these with their ancestral heritage.

In his most recent work, Sweet has further argued against the idea that creolization be seen as a domineering process in the African Atlantic world because "[m]illions of these enslaved Africans never learned European languages or ways of negotiating colonial bureaucracies of church and state. Others understood these institutions but rejected them in favor of those they found more efficacious."⁹ In the long run, however, those who wanted to survive in the New World colonies must have adjusted to the surrounding societies or

⁶ Sweet 2003.

⁷ Hawthorne 2010, pp. 225-233.

⁸ Paiva 1997, pp. 21-22. Paiva's work makes it obvious that the repertoire of Portuguese folk beliefs was at least as rich as the religious universe of Central Africans in the early modern world.

⁹ Sweet 2011, p. 5.

become runaways. At least with regard to Minas Gerais, adjustment meant partaking in Creole culture to a greater or lesser extent. Forging bonds with others was the only way to survive in *mineiro* slave society, and while it was completely possible to socialize only with others from a similar regional background in Africa, this seems rarely to have been the case, especially in instances of religious life that brought together Africans from different regions. Whether participating in Catholic brotherhoods and officially sanctioned ceremonial life, or in healing and divination rituals involving spirit possession and other suspect practices, Africans sought to heal the traumas of enslavement and establish social networks that gave them the strength to carry on with their life.

In the cultural universe of the southern Atlantic, Central Africans demonstrated a great degree of adaptability and openness to new influences. West Central Africa became an arena for the development of an Atlantic Creole society, where African and European cultural practices mixed and blended together. This mixture was certainly not without its contemporary critics, but it seems that the majority of people were at ease with the cultural development of their home region, except for the violent culture of enslavement that must have been a constant source of stress for many. The spread of Atlantic Creole culture never led to the complete abandonment of ancestral values and practices, as they continued to play an important role in people's daily life. Similar processes of cultural creolization and religious syncretism continued in Minas Gerais. Both in Africa and Brazil, Central Africans demonstrated a spirit of tolerating foreign ideas and remained open to mixed cultural expressions.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1: Regional origins of slaves disembarked in Brazil (documented)															
	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Other Africa		Totals
1701-1710	115	0.2 %	0	0.0 %	43,654	85.0 %	3081	6.0 %	4388	8.5 %	0	0.0 %	129	0.3 %	51,367
1711-1720	1,466	1.7 %	6,005	7.1 %	48,063	56.7 %	8,574	10.1 %	16,454	19.4 %	979	1.2 %	3,272	1.3 %	84,813
1721-1730	785	0.5 %	16,107	10.4 %	77,257	49.9 %	4,398	2.8 %	55,551	35.9 %	209	0.1 %	439	0.1 %	154,746
1731-1740	1,105	0.9 %	10,562	8.1 %	56,842	43.8 %	3,867	3.0 %	57,104	44.0 %	0	0.0 %	194	0.1 %	129,674
1741-1750	1,390	0.9 %	2,235	1.4 %	54,431	33.7 %	2,679	1.7 %	100,413	62.1 %	0	0.0 %	551	0.3 %	161,699
1751-1760	3,472	2.8 %	1,253	1.0 %	56,451	46.2 %	1,477	1.2 %	58,287	47.7 %	1,002	0.8 %	284	0.2 %	122,226
1761-1770	8,674	6.4 %	0	0.0 %	47,819	35.2 %	554	0.4 %	78,449	57.7 %	544	0.4 %	0	0.0 %	136,040
1771-1780	10,994	8.9 %	0	0.0 %	38,636	31.3 %	2,326	1.9 %	71,173	57.7 %	31	0.0 %	141	0.1 %	123,301
1781-1790	10,585	7.6 %	0	0.0 %	46,828	33.5 %	1,682	1.2 %	78,991	56.4 %	324	0.2 %	1,525	1.1 %	139,935
1791-1800	11,697	5.4 %	252	0.0 %	55,552	25.6 %	2,492	1.2 %	144,816	66.8 %	1,835	0.8 %	50	0.0 %	216,694
Totals	50,283	3.8 %	36,414	2.8 %	525,533	39.8 %	31,130	2.4 %	665,626	50.4 %	4,924	0.4 %	4,098	0.3 %	1,320,495

Source: TSTD (accessed 21 June 2011)

Table 2: Regional origins of slaves disembarked in Brazil (estimated)													
	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Totals
1701-1710	811	0.5 %	10,177	6.5 %	54,736	35.0 %	3,470	2.2 %	85,802	54.8 %	0	0.0 %	156,445
1711-1720	1,837	1.0 %	11,852	6.6 %	53,750	30.1 %	11,551	6.5 %	95,172	53.3 %	978	0.5 %	178,650
1721-1730	1,105	0.6 %	16,157	8.8 %	87,596	47.5 %	5,089	2.8 %	73,410	39.8 %	232	0.1 %	184,381
1731-1740	3,367	1.9 %	10,441	5.8 %	66,900	37.0 %	4,142	2.3 %	95,996	53.1 %	0	0.0 %	180,846
1741-1750	2,483	1.3 %	981	0.5 %	57,905	30.2 %	2,798	1.5 %	127,362	66.5 %	0	0.0 %	191,529
1751-1760	3,997	2.1 %	480	0.2 %	63,961	33.2 %	1,552	0.8 %	120,799	62.7 %	1,996	1.0 %	192,785
1761-1770	8,777	4.6 %	0	0.0 %	56,692	29.5 %	584	0.3 %	125,368	65.3 %	558	0.3 %	191,979
1771-1780	12,027	6.2 %	0	0.0 %	41,443	21.4 %	2,236	1.2 %	137,843	71.2 %	33	0.0 %	193,582
1781-1790	12,706	5.4 %	0	0.0 %	50,659	21.4 %	1,528	0.6 %	171,802	72.5 %	341	0.1 %	237,078
1791-1800	12,664	4.5 %	370	0.1 %	61,364	21.8 %	3,163	1.1 %	201,394	71.5 %	2,785	1.0 %	281,740
Totals	59,774	3.0 %	50,458	2.5 %	595,006	29.9 %	36,113	1.8 %	1,234,948	62.1 %	6,923	0.3 %	1,989,015

Source: TSTD (accessed 21 June 2011). N.B. Sierra Leone and Windward Coast omitted, but included in the totals.

Table 3: Regional origins of slaves disembarked in Bahia (documented)															
	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Other Africa	Totals	
1701-1710	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	43,292	90.2 %	3,081	6.4 %	1,471	3.1 %	0	0.0 %	129	0.3 %	47,973
1711-1720	1,361	2.0 %	3,138	4.5 %	44,822	64.3 %	8,217	11.8 %	9,060	13.0 %	712	1.0 %	2,405	0.3 %	69,715
1721-1730	0	0.0 %	2,547	3.1 %	52,223	63.5 %	3,225	3.9 %	24,007	29.2 %	209	0.3 %	0	0.0 %	82,211
1731-1740	638	0.7 %	1,206	1.4 %	50,475	58.4 %	3,867	4.5 %	30,110	34.8 %	0	0.0 %	194	0.2 %	86,490
1741-1750	738	0.8 %	0	0.0 %	48,361	55.6 %	2,276	2.6 %	35,541	40.9 %	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	86,916
1751-1760	171	0.2 %	224	0.3 %	46,019	65.6 %	1,212	1.7 %	21,647	30.9 %	838	1.2 %	0	0.0 %	70,111
1761-1770	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	39,355	62.4 %	554	0.9 %	22,840	36.2 %	277	0.4 %	0	0.0 %	63,026
1771-1780	277	0.4 %	0	0.0 %	34,052	45.9 %	2,138	2.9 %	37,502	50.6 %	31	0.0 %	141	0.2 %	74,141
1781-1790	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	45,930	59.7 %	1,682	2.2 %	29,053	37.7 %	324	0.4 %	0	0.0 %	76,989
1791-1800	0	0.0 %	252	0.3 %	54,994	60.6 %	2,156	2.4 %	33,257	36.7 %	0	0.0 %	50	0.1 %	90,709
Totals	3,185	0.4 %	7,567	1.0 %	45,9523	61.4 %	28,408	3.8 %	244,488	32.7 %	2,391	0.3 %	744	0.1 %	748,281

Source: TSTD (accessed 21 June 2011)

Table 4: Regional origins of slaves disembarked in Bahia (estimated)													
	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Totals
1701-1710	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	43,500	71.5 %	3,400	5.6 %	13,900	22.9 %	0	0.0 %	60,800
1711-1720	1,500	1.8 %	4,200	5.2 %	44,000	54.1 %	11,100	13.6 %	17,800	21.9 %	700	0.9 %	81,400
1721-1730	0	0.0 %	3,000	3.3 %	57,600	63.3 %	3,800	4.2 %	26,600	29.2 %	200	0.2 %	91,000
1731-1740	700	0.8 %	1,300	1.4 %	53,700	58.7 %	4,100	4.5 %	31,800	34.8 %	0	0.0 %	91,500
1741-1750	800	0.9 %	0	0.0 %	50,700	55.5 %	2,400	2.6 %	37,500	41.1 %	0	0.0 %	91,300
1751-1760	200	0.3 %	300	0.4 %	49,200	65.9 %	1,300	1.7 %	23,000	30.8 %	900	1.2 %	74,700
1761-1770	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	41,700	62.6 %	600	0.9 %	24,000	36.0 %	300	0.5 %	66,600
1771-1780	300	0.4 %	0	0.0 %	36,500	46.4 %	2,000	2.5 %	39,700	50.5 %	0	0.0 %	78,600
1781-1790	0	0.0 %	0	0.0 %	49,500	59.9 %	1,500	1.8 %	31,200	37.8 %	300	0.4 %	82,600
1791-1800	200	0.2 %	300	0.3 %	59,400	61.1 %	2,300	2.4 %	35,000	36.0 %	0	0.0 %	97,200
Totals	3,600	0.4 %	8,900	1.1 %	485,700	59.5 %	32,500	4.0 %	280,500	34.4 %	2,500	0.3 %	815,900

Source: TSTD (accessed 22 September 2011). N.B.: Rounded to the nearest hundred. Windward Coast omitted, but included in the totals.

Table 5: Regional origins of slaves disembarked in Rio (documented)															
	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Other Africa	Totals	
1701-1710	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	2,350	100,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	2,350
1711-1720	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	937	12,1 %	0	0,0 %	6,323	81,4 %	0	0,0 %	510	6,6 %	7,770
1721-1730	0	0,0 %	1,942	6,0 %	2,790	8,6 %	459	1,4 %	27,334	84,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	32,525
1731-1740	272	1,3 %	357	1,6 %	229	1,1 %	0	0,0 %	20,902	96,1 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	21,760
1741-1750	553	1,2 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	403	0,9 %	46,110	98,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	47,066
1751-1760	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	601	3,8 %	0	0,0 %	15,188	95,2 %	164	1,0 %	0	0,0 %	15,953
1761-1770	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	4,324	12,8 %	0	0,0 %	29,221	86,4 %	267	0,8 %	0	0,0 %	33,812
1771-1780	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	327	2,1 %	0	0,0 %	15,216	97,9 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	15,543
1781-1790	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	29,400	100,0 %	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	29,400
1791-1800	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %	230	0,2 %	0	0,0 %	94,078	98,2 %	1,464	1,5 %	0	0,0 %	95,772
Totals	825	0,3 %	2,299	0,8 %	9,438	3,1 %	862	0,3 %	286,122	94,8 %	1,895	0,6 %	510	0,2 %	301,951

Source: TSTD (accessed 21 June 2011)

	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic		Gold Coast		Bight of Benin		Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands		West Central Africa and St. Helena		Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands		Totals
1701-1710	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1,100	2.6%	0	0.0%	40,500	97.4%	0	0.0%	41,600
1711-1720	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1,500	2.7%	0	0.0%	53,600	96.8%	0	0.0%	55,400
1721-1730	0	0.0%	2,000	3.9%	6,200	12.1%	500	1.0%	42,300	82.6%	0	0.0%	51,200
1731-1740	1,600	2.5%	500	0.8%	5,900	9.2%	0	0.0%	56,000	87.5%	0	0.0%	64,000
1741-1750	900	1.3%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	400	0.6%	68,000	98.1%	0	0.0%	69,300
1751-1760	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4,500	5.5%	0	0.0%	75,700	93.0%	1,100	1.4%	81,400
1761-1770	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	10,700	12.6%	0	0.0%	73,700	87.0%	300	0.4%	84,700
1771-1780	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	400	0.5%	0	0.0%	79,000	99.5%	0	0.0%	79,400
1781-1790	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	109,700	100%	0	0.0%	109,700
1791-1800	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	300	0.3%	0	0.0%	118,200	98.5%	1,500	1.3%	120,000
Totals	2,500	0.3%	2,400	0.3%	30,700	4.1%	900	0.1%	716,600	94.7%	2,800	0.4%	756,600

Source: TSTD (accessed 22 September 2011). N.B.: Rounded to the nearest hundred. Sierra Leone omitted, but included in the totals.

Swedish Summary – Sammanfattning

Föreliggande studie behandlar slavimport från västra Centralafrika och slavarnas religiösa praktiker i sjuttonhundratalets Minas Gerais. Minas Gerais i det brasilianska inlandet utvecklades till världens största område för guldproduktion i början av sjuttonhundratalet. Brytning av guld i stor skala (senare även diamanter) var möjligt bara genom en massiv import av slavar från Afrika. Då gruvindustrin börjat avta efter medlet av århundradet koncentrerades den ekonomiska aktiviteten på jordbruket. Under alla dessa olika faser baserade sig ekonomin på afrikanska slavars arbete. Avhandlingen undersöker transatlantiska förbindelser mellan västra Centralafrika och Minas Gerais.

Avhandlingen är uppdelad i två delar. Studiens första del handlar om slavhandeln i den södra delen av den atlantiska världen. Upptäckten av guld ledde till en ökad efterfrågan på slavar i Brasilien, en efterfrågan som till stor del täcktes av utbudet i Angola. Som resultat kom våld och osäkerhet att karaktärisera det angolanska samhället under sjuttonhundratalet. Jag analyserar framväxten av identiteter hos personer från västra Centralafrika både i hemlandet och i Minas Gerais. Slavidentiteter eller ”nationer” har ofta betraktats som något som slavägarna skapade för sina syften, särskilt i den brasilianska historiografin. I kontrast till detta tolkar jag viktiga centralafrikanska ”nationer” såsom angola, congo och benguela som uttryck för regionala identiteter med förbindelser till slavarnas ursprung i Afrika. Genom att analysera faserna i identitetsbildningen under processen som förde dem från Afrika till Nya Världen placerar studien den brasilianska historien djupare i en afrikansk kontext. Jag visar hur slavars identiteter började ta form redan i västra Centralafrika före överfarten till Amerika. I Minas Gerais fortsatte processen genom att centralafrikaner aktivt medverkade i förhandlingar kring och återskapandet av sina identiteter.

Data gällande antalet afrikaner som fördes till Amerika finns tillgängligt i den nya databasen TSTD, (Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database) som utnyttjas i diskussionen om olika afrikanska regioners betydelse för brasilianska slavhandlare. Enligt de dokumenterade uppgifterna om slavimport var antalet förslavade centralafrikaner som anlände till Brasilien under sjuttonhundratalet 665 626 individer, vilket utgjorde hälften av det totala antalet av afrikaner som importerades till Brasilien under perioden. Det har dock uppskattats att så många som 1 234 900 individer från västra Centralafrika kom till Brasilien under sjuttonhundratalet, nämligen 62 procent av den estimerade slavimporten

från Afrika. Det är uppenbart den demografiska effekten av slavimporten från västra Centralafrika hade stor betydelse för identitetsformeringen i det koloniala brasilianska samhället. Bara exporten från Beninbukten kunde demografiskt konkurrera med exporten från västra Centralafrika.

Luanda och Benguela var de mest betydande slavhamnarna i västra Centralafrika under den transatlantiska slavhandelsperioden. Luanda var alltid den viktigaste hamnen och under sjuttonhundratalet exporterades slavar från Benguela först till Luanda för att sedan bli skeppade till Brasilien. Direkt export från Benguela inleddes under det tidiga sjuttonhundratalet och ökade därefter. Under seklets sista decennier låg slavexporten från Benguela inte långt efter exporten från Luanda. I Minas Gerais märktes detta som en ökning av centralafrikaner som identifierade sig som benguelas. Även om uppgifterna om förhållandet mellan könen på slavresorna från Centralafrika är knappa är det sannolikt att de manliga slaverna utgjorde över 70 procent av de exporterade individerna, en något högre proportion jämfört med andra exportområden. Den ständiga ökningen av slavexporten under sjuttonhundratalet kunde bara upprätthållas genom systematiskt våld och slavräder på ett vidsträckt område. I praktiken innebar detta att nästan vem som helt kunde bli fångad som slav.

Människornas liv i det portugisiska Angola och dess omgivning kunde ödeläggas genom de våldsamma upplevelser som slavräderna och tillfångatagandet innebar. De som överlevde de omänskliga förhållandena under färden över Atlanten var ofta psykiskt skadade och traumatiserade. Trots de förödmjukande upplevelserna lyckades flera av dem skapa meningsfulla liv som slavar i Brasilien medan vissa till och med lyckades återvinna sin frihet. I stället för att betrakta slavar som passiva och maktlösa hävdar studien att en stor del av de brasilianska slaverna lyckades finna sätt att uttrycka sin kultur och förmåga att ta ansvar för sina liv trots alla svårigheter. Ett av studiens syften är att utreda hur detta var möjligt.

Från och med det sena fjortonhundratalet utvecklades västcentralafrikanska kulturella praktiker i kontakter med portugisiska och brasilianska handelsmän, administratörer och missionärer. Detta ledde inte bara till kreolisering i den portugisiska kolonin Angola utan också till att många slavar vid sin ankomst till Brasilien redan var påverkade av blandning av kulturer som kännetecknade deras egna samhällen. En analys av kulturella identiteter i den sydatlantiska världen bör därför börja med kolonin Angola, *Reino de Angola*, som utformades under femton- och sextonhundratalet, och i omgivande områden i västra Centralafrika. De grundläggande frågorna gäller vilka de slavar som fördes till Brasilien var och hurdana kulturella värderingar och antaganden de förde med sig över Atlanten.

I syfte att bättre förstå slaveriet i Amerika har många forskare sett det som nödvändigt att börja sin undersökning i Afrika. Forskare som John Thornton

och Paul Lovejoy har förespråkat ett sådant metodologiskt angreppssätt. De har gjort detta genom att rigoröst undersöka historiska dokument. Thornton har kritiserat specialister i Amerikas historia för att inte helt ha förstått dynamiken i förkoloniala afrikanska samhällen eftersom de studerat afrikansk kultur genom mediet av modern antropologi snarare än genom en omsorgsfull analys av historiska källor. Sådana studier har lett till påståenden som baserat sig på det teoretiska antagandet att samhällen och kulturer i Afrika inte förändrats över tid. Jag har valt västra Centralafrika som utgångspunkt för studien i enlighet med Thorntons och Lovejoys metodologi.

I stället för att betrakta området som ett isolerat bakvatten bortom mänsklig utveckling studerar jag det som en mötesplats för en mängd folk och kulturer. De talrika mötena resulterade i ett kontaktsamhälle där afrikaner umgicks med och mottog influenser från människor från andra kontinenter. I västra Centralafrika utvecklade samhällen som idkade handel vissa karaktäristiska egenskaper genom umgänget med andra kulturer. Vid mitten av sextonhundratalet hade en kreolkultur vuxit fram i det portugisiska Angola. Kreolkulturen var ett resultat av afrikaniseringen av portugisiska inflyttare och deras kultur men även afrikanerna integrerade – selektivt – vissa element av de europeiska sedvänjorna i sin kultur. Genom den transatlantiska slavhandeln förde afrikaner med sig element av denna kultur till plantager, gruvor och urbana centra i Brasilien.

I det brasilianska slavsamhället identifierades afrikaner enligt deras regionala tillhörighet genom att gruppera dem i ”nationer”, *nação*. För slavägarna var nationerna först och främst ett instrument som hjälpte dem identifiera den egendom som slavar utgjorde. Tillsammans med sitt kristna namn gavs slavar tillhörighet i en ”nation” på basis av den afrikanska hamn de avseglat från. Namn som ofta förekommer i brasilianska dokument – såsom João Angola, Maria Benguela, Francisco Congo eller Pedro Mina – reflekterar denna praxis. Även om afrikanerna hade andra sätt att identifiera varandra berättas inget om detta i de historiska källorna. Det skriftliga vittnesmålet tiger också till nästan helt om betydelsen av slavar och frigivna slavar tillhörighet i en viss afrikansk ”nation”. Det finns dock argument för att de afrikanska ”nationerna” fungerade som en organiserande princip för grupper av slavar och frigivna slavar.

Min avhandling är ett försök att utreda vad det innebar att vara angola, congo eller benguela i Minas Gerais under sjuttonhundratalet. Tidigare forskning har lagt stor vikt på att förklara varför specifika afrikanska etniska identiteter inte framträdde oftare i det koloniala brasilianska samhället och betrakta afrikanska ”nationer” som uttryck för slavägarens makt i utformandet av slavens identitet. Mitt mål har varit att betona ”nationer” som regionala identiteter som inte enbart var påhittade av de vita utan som också hade stor betydelse för afrikanerna

själva. I stället för att se afrikanska ”nationer” som något som slavar utvecklade sedan de kommit till Amerika hävdar jag att ”nationerna” i själva verket började ta form redan då förslavade afrikaner blev förda till kusten för att skeppas till Amerika i grupper. Känslan av tillhörighet i denna nya ”nation” förstärktes av upplevelserna under överfarten och i mötet med andra som delade samma öde i Brasilien. Ett av de säkraste sätten att finna något slags samhörighet var att utplåna skillnaderna som de etniska olikheterna gav upphov till även friktioner mellan de olika individerna i gruppen måste ha existerat. I praktiken innebar detta att slavarna måste finna gemensamma nämnare när det gällde språkliga, religiösa och kulturella praktiker. För centralafrikaner erbjöd de för de olika parterna begripliga bantuspråken en möjlighet till språklig samhörighet inom ramen för ”nationen”. Medan portugisiska var det dominerande språket i relationerna mellan slavar och slavägare kunde slavar med samma språkliga bakgrund hjälpa nya slavar som inte ännu bemästrade portugisiska.

Efter att importen av slavar från Västafrika minskat i förhållande till slavimporten från Centralafrika på 1730-talet blev Angola den mest betydande ”nationen” i Minas Gerais fram till omkring 1780. Angola åsyftade slavar som inledde överfarten i Luanda. För slavarna hade termen olika innebörder. Då de betecknades som angola kunde det betyda ”staden Angola” (Luanda), den portugisiska kolonin Angola (*Reino de Angola*) eller mera obestämt, obygdan (*sertão*) i Angola. I Minas Gerais användes Angola också för att beteckna den angolanska kusten (*costa*). I Centralafrika hade distinktionen mellan staden Angola eller obygdan utanför Angola haft stor betydelse medan den gemensamma upplevelsen av slavräderna och fångenskapen fick större betydelse i Brasilien. Uppkomsten av den portugisiska kolonin Angola, oberoende av hur svag den portugisiska kontrollen var i regionen, var viktigt i skapandet av en regional identitet hos kolonins invånare.

Slavar som identifierades som congo utgör ett dilemma i ett sådant schema. I och med att även de var exporterade från Luanda borde de ha tillhört ”nationen” angola i Brasilien. Emellertid brukade de dock, som talare av språket kikongo, på språkliga grunder särskiljas från angolas som till största delen talade kimbundu-språk. Samtidigt måste de också ha haft förmågan att förmedla en stark gruppidentitet som även övertygade deras ägare om att congo var sin egen skiljda grupp. Framväxten av congo ”nationen” i Brasilien är kanske det mest avslöjande exemplet på hur slavar definierade sin identitet i stället för att låta deras ägare göra det. Enligt logiken enligt vilken slavars identitet definierades enligt exporthamnen skulle alla congo ha förvandlats till angola i Brasilien. Då congo-slavarna började anlända till Minas Gerais hade congos importerats till Brasilien i över ett sekel och definitionen congo som ”nation” var redan etablerad i Brasiliens hamnar. Den komplicerade frågan gällde vem som var congo under sjuttonhundratalet då kungadömet Kongo

till stor del upplösts under sextonhundratalets inbördeskrig. Jag argumenterar för att inte bara människor från området São Salvador, Kongos huvudstad och kungadömet hjärta, men också invånare i de omgivande områdena fortsatte att omhulda tanken om det gamla kungadömet och identifierade sig därmed som congo i Brasilien.

Benguela var den tredje viktiga regionala identiteten i Minas Gerais. Närvaron av "nationen" benguela var starkast under perioden 1780-1840. Identiteten som benguela antogs till stor del på samma sätt som den som angola. I kolonin Benguela (*Reino de Benguela*) var den portugisiska kontrollen emellertid ännu svagare än i Angola. Föreställningen om livet i inlandet i *Reino de Benguela* påverkade inte benguela-slavarna i samma utsträckning som uppfattningen om *Reino de Angola*, åtminstone inte under sjuttonhundratalet. Jag argumenterar i min studie för att den regionala identiteten för benguela-slavar i stor utsträckning formades av upplevelsen att tillsammans ha hamnat ombord på ett slavskepp i Benguela. I Brasilien var personer från de centrala högländerna och södra Angola tvungna att tona ned de politiska oenigheter de eventuellt haft i sitt hemland. Därigenom kunde de komma samman som "nationen" benguela vilket erbjöd dem såväl en känsla av samhörighet och mening som trygghet i mera konkret bemärkelse i det brasilianska slavsamhället.

Studiens andra del koncentrerar sig på centralafrikanernas religiösa universum. Efter portugisernas ankomst till kungadömet Kongo under fjortonhundratalets senare del påverkades centralafrikanska samhällen av processer av kulturell kreolisering som ledde till framväxten av en atlantisk kreolkultur. Kreoliseringen påverkade inte alla områden i samma utsträckning; den var mest påtaglig i Luanda med hinterland och i kungadömet Kongo. I inlandet bortom Benguela spred sig den atlantiska kreolkulturen långsammare och ökade i betydelse först under sjuttonhundratalets senare del. Förutom religiös synkretism influerade kreoliseringen språkliga och kulturella praktiker såsom kosthåll, musik, namnskick och klädsel. Det kulturella utbytet gällde både portugiser och afrikaner. Det var inte någon process där ena parten skulle ha tvingat sina värderingar och idéer på den andra.

Kreoliseringsprocesserna var en integrerad del av den kulturella utvecklingen även i det brasilianska gruvdistriktet. Inom den brasilianska historiografin har dessa processer för Minas Gerais del främst analyserats av Eduardo França Paiva som använder begreppet *mestiçagem* för blandningen av raser och kulturer. I föreliggande studie betraktas den södra atlantiska världen som ett kulturellt enhetlig rum. Centralafrikaner som landade i Brasilien och kom till Minas Gerais mötte många portugisiska kulturella praktiker som de redan var bekanta med från sina egna samhällen. Centralafrikanernas antal garanterade också att deras bidrag till det framväxande *mineiro*-samhället var betydande. Kanske det mest främmande som nykomlingarna mötte var de

svarta afrikanerna som importerats från regioner som helt saknade kontakt med Centralafrika. Dessa människor talade språk som var obegripliga för de bantu-talande och hade sina egna traditioner. Inom det religiösa livet delade västafrikanerna och centralafrikanerna dock flera uppfattningar om den andliga dimensionen. Utrymme för samarbete kunde alltså finnas på detta område vilket illustreras i kapitlen fem och sex.

Spridningen av katolicismen i Centralafrika påverkade det religiösa livet särskilt i kungadömet Kongo, i staden Luanda och i *Reino de Angola*. Antagandet av den katolska läran var mest uppenbar i kungadömet Kongo som bibehöll sitt rykte som kristet kungadöme även efter att det upplöstes under inbördeskrig i slutet av sextonhundratalet. Katolicismen spred sig dock inte till alla delar av Kongo i samma utsträckning utan var mest framträdande i närheten av São Salvador medan förändringarna i det rituella livet på den avlägsna landsbygden var minimala. Detta är inte förvånande då antalet missionärer i Kongo och i övriga områden i Centralafrika var lågt. Kyrkliga rapporter från senare delen av sjuttonhundratalet visar att många kyrkor och kapell i *Reino de Angola* var länge utan präster och att byggnaderna förföll. Trots missionärernas ringa antal antog afrikanerna dock katolska praktiker även om de gjorde det selektivt. I kungadömet Kongo och kolonin Angola hjälpte afrikanska lekman-assistenter till att sprida och upprätthålla den atlantiska kreoliserade kristendomen som var rådande. Källorna visar att det fanns en betydande marknad för katolsk parafernalia inklusive helgonbilder och rituella föremål. Detta ledde till synkretistiska former av dyrkan, där inhemska gudabilder och figurer som representerade förfäderna var närvarande tillsammans med kristna föremål.

Centralafrikanska religiösa specialister anklagades ofta av auktoriteterna i Angola för att organisera helande- och spådomsritualer. Förutom afrikanerna valde även många portugiser att söka sig till afrikanska helare och många tog deras mediciner. Diagnosen i dessa ritualer gjordes ofta genom andebesatthet vilket inkquisitionen betraktade som djävuldyrkan. Från den afrikanska synvinkeln fanns det inget ont med ceremonierna och helandet gjordes alltid med naturliga mediciner. Afrikaner tog med sig dessa metoder för läkande och spådom till Minas Gerais där talrika religiösa specialister hade en framträdande position. I det brasilianska gruvdistriktet var det vanligt att afrikanska medicinmän inte bara tjänade den afrikanska slavbefolkningen utan också de fria vita. De centralafrikanska helbrägdagörarnas bidrag till läkekonsten i Minas Gerais och övriga delar av Brasilien var därmed viktigt.

I det kulturella universum som den södra Atlanten utgjorde, uppvisade afrikanerna från västra Centralafrika en stor öppenhet och beredskap att anpassa sig till nya förhållanden. Västra Centralafrika blev en arena för utvecklingen av ett atlantiskt kreolsamhälle där afrikanska och europeiska kulturella praktiker

sammanblandades. Blandningen hade förvisso sina samtida kritiker men det förefaller som om majoriteten av folket var tillfreds med den kulturella utvecklingen i sin hemregion med undantag av de våldsamma slavstäderna som torde ha varit en ständig källa till stress för många. Spridningen av den atlantiska kreolkulturen ledde aldrig till att traditionella värderingar och praktiker övergavs utan dessa fortsatte att spela en viktig roll i människors vardagsliv. Liknande processer av kulturell kreolisering och religiös synkretism fortsatte i Minas Gerais. Afrikaner både i Afrika och i Brasilien uppvisade en tolerans och en hög grad av mottaglighet för främmande idéer.

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- Códices

Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais/Torre do Tombo (ANTT)

Tribunal do Santo Ofício/Inquisição de Lisboa (TSO/IL)

- Cadernos do Promotor
- Processos

Brazil

Arquivo da Cúria Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte (ACM)

- Visitas pastorais

Arquivo Eclesiástico da Arquidiocese de Mariana (AEAM)

- Devassas eclesiásticas

Arquivo Histórico da Câmara Municipal de Mariana (AHCMM)

- Códices

Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte (APM)

- Câmara municipal de Sabará
- Seção Colonial, Secretaria de Governo da Capitania

Casa Borba Gato, Sabará (CBG)

- Testamentos

Casa do Pilar, Ouro Preto (CP)

- Devassas

Casa Setecentista, Mariana (CSM)

- Livros de registro de testamentos

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