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Creolization and Empire: Creating Diversity and Navigating Social Change in Portuguese West Africa

Philip J. Havik¹

Abstract

The twin phenomena of the formation of Creole strata and societies and cultural creolization have dominated debates on the uniqueness of Caribbean contexts and universalist notions of cross-cultural interaction at a global level. These analytical threads are integrated into a study of processes of creolization and acculturation in their multiple forms in areas of (former) Portuguese presence in West Africa. Deeply entangled with four centuries of the Atlantic slave trade and the rise and fall of the colonial state, the remarkable diversity of cross-cultural encounters in empire is addressed here for Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Angola.

Keywords

Creolization, Portuguese empire, Cultural diversity, Social change, West Africa

Resumo

Os dois fenómenos relativos a formação de sociedades e estratos sociais crioulos, e a criouliização cultural tem dominado os debates sobre a exclusividade dos Caribos e a noção universalista da interação transcultural ao nível global. Estes fios analíticos estão integrados num estudo de processos de criouliização e aculturação nas suas múltiplas formas em áreas de antiga presença portuguesa na África Ocidental. Profundamente entrelaçados com quatro séculos do tráfico de escravos e a ascensão e queda do Estado colonial, a diversidade notável dos encontros transculturais no império é aqui abordado para Cabo Verde, Guiné-Bissau, São Tomé e Príncipe e Angola.

Palavras chave

Criouliização, Império português, Diversidade cultural, Mudanças sociais, África Ocidental

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Introduction

Before embarking upon a discussion of creolization in areas of Portuguese presence, a few issues related to the epistemology and debate on creolization in general and in empire will be summarised here. The lack of consensus on a definition for creolization, which originated from linguistics, and its singular or universal dimensions have marked the academic field for decades. Strongly marked by distinct epistemological strands, most notably advanced in Francophone and Anglophone scholarship, distinctions have been made regarding processes of creolization with a strong Caribbean signifier (Chivallon 2013; Stewart 2007; Palmié 2006). The political context of *creolité*—and *négritude*—forms part of this regional dimension, associated with anti-colonial resistance. Some have pointed however at the exclusion of certain groups, such as Indo-Caribbeans, arguing for a broader definition of the concept (Khan 2001).

From a conceptual perspective, the formation of Creole societies on the one hand and the notion of cultural creolization on the other need to be distinguished from the outset. Debates on creolization have evoked two approaches: the first centering on the unique character of the insular Caribbean experience (Mintz & Price 1992; Price 2001), and the second on the universality of global forms of cultural hybridization in colonial and post-colonial worlds (Hannerz 1987; Cohen 2007). The study of creolization in maritime empires has been strongly associated with the trans-Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades. Thus, trans-cultural dimensions of empire are deeply entangled with diasporic fluxes based upon voluntary mobility (emigration, trade), forced dislocation (slaves, convicts), and the socio-cultural diversity it produced (Havik and Newitt 2015: 3). Critical historicist discourses surrounding the (essentialist and Anglophone) Black Atlantic (Sansone et al. 2018; Naro et al. 2007) have further deepened the conceptual ambivalence of studies on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and fragmented creolized identities (Palmié 2014). The notion of Atlantic Creoles emerging as a loosely defined, heterogenous clusters on the West-African coast establishes a link with the Afro-Atlantic encounter and processes of acculturation in early Portuguese enclaves, thereafter reproduced in other areas of European presence (Berlin 1996).

Novel approaches have emerged over the last decade such as cultural pidginization. Based upon a comparison of historical dynamics in Indonesia and Sierra Leone, the forging of shared cultural traits gave rise to a novel, structurally autonomous, and exclusive identity. Although not impeding the future development of creole cultures, the construction of pidginized indigeneity by assimilating exogenous cultural representations without shedding

endogenous ones can take on different, intermediate forms (Knörr 2010). By engaging in selective cultural borrowing while its protagonists retain their ethnic languages, institutions, and practices, pidginization as a form of cultural creolization ‘from below’ would allow for the articulation of trans-cultural interactions at the colonial margins (Kohl 2018). The term *creolage* proposed by Haeussler and Webster (2020) combines creolization with bricolage (originally proposed by Levi-Strauss) based upon a bottom-up approach to social change and the shaping of hybrid social identities and practices at the micro-level. By focusing on the self-promotion of liminal or marginalized individuals and groups, such as slaves, indentured workers, soldiers, peasant farmers, craftspeople, and petty traders, *creolage* evokes personalized and peer-group related strategies towards upward mobility (Haeussler and Webster 2020: 5).

Creolized communities in empire were associated with diasporic movement and indigenization. Driven by maritime trade and settlement within “moving spaces” or “places in movement” (Berthet et al. 2019), their mobility centred on ports and plantation systems related to the slave and sugar complex. Diasporic agency has been associated with European voluntary emigration, communities persecuted by authorities such as the Sephardim New Christians and the massive, forced dislocation of enslaved Africans (Newitt 2017; Havik & Newitt 2015: 3-5). However, the intense socio-cultural interactions in empire also underline the role of processes of indigenization and endogenous agency involving African communities which were inexorably drawn into the orbit of Atlantic trade and settlement. Maritime ports attracted local populations, harbouring heterogenous agglomerations, which were the product of globalizing trade networks but also of endogenous ecological, socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics. The notion of a *creolosphere* with sub-spaces (e.g., the Atlantic and Indian Oceans) (Grassin 2012)—or *creoloscapes*—dotting the globe, has been put forward to raise the understanding of creolization’s “perpetual movement” and heterogeneity within an extensive network of inter-connected but nevertheless autonomous spaces.

The spatial and social ecology of these locations and their hinterland was a major factor inducing cross-cultural transformations, understood here as “creative cultural re-combinations” (Khan 2001: 293). Archaeological and linguistic evidence has provided support for the multiplicity of factors influencing the emergence of Creole societies and their capacity to adapt to local conditions (Chaudenson et al. 2001: viii) via displacement and invention (Eriksen 2019: 139). These settlements and their surroundings were more than mere slave ports, being “inextricably linked to a process of hybridisation between the African, European and American dynamics” (Saupin 2020: 184). Institutions (*carnival*), cosmologies

(*candomblé*, antonianism), ritual objects (*bolsas de mandinga*), architecture (*sobrado*), music (*morna*, *batuque*, *semba*), food (*cachupa*, *calulu*), beverages (*cachaça*, *grogue*), and languages all travelled and morphed in the transformative Atlantic seascape. Hence, it can be argued that both creolized populations and processes of acculturation were “instrumental” for the integration of contact zones in insular and coastal Africa into regional and global trade systems (Newitt 2017).

Iberian contexts constitute a particular niche for research (Elliot 2015). Whereas the Portuguese presence in West Africa already made itself felt from the mid-1400s onwards, Spanish rule largely centred on the Americas, incorporating areas previously under Portuguese control (McWorther 1995) with Hispanic-African possessions only being acquired in the late nineteenth century (Mufwene 2014). This socio-political distinction has in turn been linked to the presence or absence of pidgins and creole languages and to distinct processes of cultural creolization. The rarity of creole languages with a Spanish lexicon (Palenquero in Colombia and Chabacano in the Philippines) which have their roots in Portuguese pidgins (McWorther 1995) is contrasted with their great diversity in a Portuguese context: e.g., *Kriolu* in Cabo Verde, *Kriol* in Guinea-Bissau and the Lower Casamance region in Senegal, Santome, Angolar (*ngola*) e Lung’yi in São Tomé and Príncipe, *fa d’ambo* (Annobon Island Creole), Nou Ling/Kristi in the Korlai region in India, Kristang in West Malacca, Papia Cristam in Macau, and Bidau Portuguese in East Timor (Mufwene 2014). Papiamentu, spoken in the Dutch Antilles has a composite Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch lexicon. Although not resulting in creole languages, the Brazilian conundrum exposed the tensions between the heterogenous forms of cultural creolization and Africanization in a plantation society (Mufwene 2014). In the case of coastal Angola, ethnic languages (such as Kimbundu) became *linguas francas* for populations of the *praças* (fortified settlements or garrison towns) and local intermediaries with the Mbundu hinterland (Dias 1984: 63/64).

Even though the Spanish term (*criollo*) is of likely Lusophone origin (*crioulo*) (Chaudenson et al. 2001: 4), its usage and signification, however, differed and still differs greatly between areas of Portuguese presence. National identity and culture in Cabo Verde, a pejorative connotation in Brazil (Almeida 2007: 108), the lingua franca (*Kriol* or Guinean Creole) in Guinea-Bissau (Havik 2007), and cross-cultural assimilation in coastal Angola (Ferreira 2007) denote marked differences within Lusophone spaces. Whereas a distinct creole national identity is assumed in Cabo Verde (Madeira 2015; Fernandes 2000), there is a lack of consensus on the nature of creole identities in other former Portuguese colonies (Kohl 2018; Seibert 2012: 67; Corrado 2010; Trajano Filho 2007; Dias 1984) owing to the inherent tensions between endogeneity and exogeneity.

In view of the great diversity of ‘hybrid’ cultures and communities, areas of Portuguese presence, and West Africa in particular are discussed below as a particular matrix for both cultural creolization and the formation of Creole strata in historical, anthropological, and linguistic perspective (Newitt 2017; Havik and Newitt 2015; Cabral 2015; Rosa 2015; Seibert 2012 & 2014; Lobato and Manso 2013; Bethencourt 2011; Naro et al. 2007; Almeida 2004) without losing sight of their wider trans-imperial dimensions. The following sections centre on the different forms of cross-cultural interaction and trans-cultural diversity in its broadest sense by focusing on three related issues: the elasticity of spatial and social boundaries, social change and disorder, and the continuity and instability of the dynamics of creolization and acculturation.

Redefining Space and Place

Besides some coastal areas in Africa which were occupied militarily, such as sections of the Angolan coast, the frontiers of maritime empires in West Africa were porous, changeable, and often elusive. The situation differed between continental and insular spaces: initially imposed by colonizers upon imported slaves and indentured labour in insular domains, they had to be negotiated with African societies and intermediaries in continental areas. Whilst the slave trade dominated the former, export crops (sugar, coffee, cacao)—while also fomenting the introduction of subsistence crops (rice, maize, millet, sorghum, and cassava)—were central to the latter. The former sourced African supply routes, the latter operated as Atlantic hubs during the first five centuries of contact. In demographic terms, slave populations were central to Afro-Atlantic economies; given their heterogenous composition, they provided fertile terrain for the emergence of contact languages in insular—and coastal—contexts (Chaudenson 2001: 1-13).

The notion of contact zones as proposed by Pratt (1992)—taking its cue from linguistics—relates to the “interactive and improvisational” transcultural interactions occurring in colonial spaces which tend to be unequal, asymmetrical, coercive, and conflictual (Pratt 1992: 6). One of the innovative characteristics of creolization studies is their focus on the fluidity of spatial and social boundaries, which facilitated the emergence of bounded, heterogenous social formations and identities (Eriksen 2019: 141). Whereas the elasticity and redrawing of boundaries are key features of cross-cultural interaction and its signification, they also fix clear social perimeters, creating order out of their transgressive nature. Hence, Creole societies thrive on the porousness of frontiers whilst ensuring their own continuity as

“bounded entities” (Eriksen 2019: 134-135). The idea of contact zones as transformative spaces where existing institutions and traditions are disrupted, intentionally and accidentally, giving way to novel hierarchies, meanings, and practices has been associated with Victor Turner’s concept of liminality. Transculturation—through “deculturation and neoculturation”—and socio-cultural diversity constitute common denominators of these dynamics (Lehmkuhl et al. 2015: 7-10).

The great diversity that emerged with imperial expansion as it disrupted and reconfigured these “moving spaces,” has been extensively studied in the case of areas of Portuguese presence. The emergence of Creole strata and languages has been investigated in regard to insular spaces such as Cabo Verde (Madeira 2015; Cabral 2015; Seibert 2014; Green 2012, 2014; Almeida 2007; Fernandes 2000) and São Tomé and Príncipe (hereafter STP) (Seibert 2012, 2014; Henriques 2000; Hagemeijer 1999) from a historiographical anthropological and linguistic perspective. The study of social institutions that sustained processes of transculturation has tended to stress the differences between insular and coastal dynamics. Cabo Verde has been singled out for the formation of a Creole society from the 1500s, where Creole strata acting as social, economic, and political protagonists ensured the continuity of a nominally Portuguese dominion in the Atlantic (Fernandes 2000: 36). Boasting a unifying language (Kriolu)—with insular dialects and strata (*badiu*, on Santiago Island and *sampajudo* on São Vicente)—it contrasts with STP owing to the conjunction of diverse creolized strata (such as the Forro and the Angolares) and languages (*Forro*, *Lung’ye*, *Angolar*) with temporal breaks in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. In insular settings such as STP certain areas and populations remained beyond the control of colonial authorities, as early grand marronage demonstrates (Seibert 2015: 83). For centuries, the Angolares succeeded in maintaining territorial control, developing their own institutions in the inaccessible densely forested south of the island of São Tomé (Seibert 2015: 83-84). The shift of the slave monopoly to Angola and competition from Brazilian sugar in the late 1500s led European settlers to withdraw, intensifying endogenous transculturation on the *fazendas* or *roças* (plantations). The continuous large-scale presence of enslaved populations in STP distinguish it from the Cabo Verde Islands, as does the permanence of the plantation-based economy; the recolonization of STP by Europeans from the nineteenth century that led to an upsurge of the plantation economy—non-existent in Cabo Verde as the *morgadio* was replaced by a sharecropping system (Clarence-Smith 1985: 75)—took place at the expense of the land-owning Forro population (Seibert 2014).

As slaving hubs, the Cabo Verde archipelago and STP acted as advanced maritime frontiers in the Afro-Atlantic region. Once Cabo Verde lost its pivotal position in the mid-1600s when the Portuguese crown consented to metropolitan and local continental traders bypassing the entrepot, the process of creolization intensified as Creole *brancos da terra* (a term for ‘local whites’) and their militias were left in effective control until the 1800s (Fernandes 2000). However, many *filhos da terra* (P: children of the land) failed to become part of the land-owning elite, while economic decline and famines affected impoverished populations. In the process, different creolized strata vied for power and privilege, as pockets formed of fugitive slaves (Seibert 2014; Green 2012b; Brooks 2006; Soares 2005). The emigration of Caboverdians was strongly associated with socio-economic upheavals. First, emigrating via Atlantic whalers in the late eighteenth century, and from the early 1900s to North America (e.g., the *mercavos* from Fogo Island and migrants from Brava Island) and to the African coast (Senegal, Portuguese Guinea and Angola)—as well as to STP from the early 1900s (Madeira 2015; Almeida 2004). Ecology and climate (successive famines in 1831-1833 and 1864-1866) and legal reforms —outlawing primogeniture / *morgadio* in 1863—as well as the abolition of the slave trade (1875) acted as crucial triggers of the population exodus, redefining Creole relatedness in the diaspora (Fernandes 2000).

Creolized—and ethnic—trade diasporas and networks were also active in coastal Angola (Candido 2013; Alencastro 2012; Ferreira 2006; Dias 2002; Miller 1988; Stamm 1972; Oliveira 1968) and the Guinea-Bissau region, encompassing current Guinea-Bissau and Lower Casamance region in Senegal (Nafafé 2015; Horta 2014; Djaló 2013; Seibert, 2012; Mark & Horta 2011; Havik 2004; Brooks 2003; Horta 2000; Mark 1999; Trajano Filho 1998; Boulègue 1989). Whilst land and slaves were the key social signifiers in insular societies, the *praça* formed the core of their Afro-Atlantic identities. Usually located on the coast or along rivers, these *praças* or ports formed the gateways or “portals” (Weiss 2016) to the African interior. Until the incorporation into colonial administrations with the liberal reforms in Portugal the 1830s, these outposts of empire were controlled by creolized trading lineages (see below) and free Africans according to a hierarchy of kinship and descent. Their social and cultural capital derived from privileged relations with African political entities allowed them to leverage spatial and social boundaries in continental spaces (Horta 2014; Green 2012a; Bethencourt 2011; Brooks 2010, 2003; Havik 2004; Mark 1999; Thornton 1998; Miller 1988; Dias 1984).

The notion of ‘moveable spaces’ is exemplified by Angola, where clusters of creolized traders including *pumbeiros e donas* based in Luanda, Benguela, and Mossamedes operated

beyond imperial boundaries, for example in the Kingdom of Kongo and Mbundu (Oliveira 2021; Candido 2013; Dias 2002; Thornton 1998; Miller 1988). As in the Upper Guinea region where *lançados*, *filhos da terra* (born from mixed marriages), *tungumás* (free African women traders), and *grumetes* (Kriston) roamed the contact zone by means of alliances with local African polities (Nafafé 2015; Green 2011; Havik 2004). Local trade diasporas such as Ambakista in Angola, descended from fugitive slaves, spoke a Kimbundu dialect (*Mbaka*) with a Portuguese lexicon (Dias 2002; Alencastro 2017), whereas the Kriston in the Guinea-Bissau region engendered what is now Guinean Creole (*Kriol*) from different West Atlantic African languages. The resulting Creole dialects became *linguas francas* via trade ports such as Geba, Cacheu, and Bissau, also for Caboverdean Creole and Portuguese speakers (Kohl 2018; Djaló 2013; Havik 2007; Trajano Filho 1998). Depending on ecological, epidemiological, and political conditions, these activities pushed the ‘slaving frontier’—as originally proposed by Miller (1988) for Angola—inwards to increase the capture radius beyond areas of Portuguese settlement as African polities accommodated, mediated, or resisted incorporation in the Afro-Atlantic trade whilst engendering novel plural identities in the process (Ferreira 2012; Green 2012a; Dias 2002; Havik 2004).

Mobility and Social Change

Afro-Atlantic exchanges gave rise to massive migratory fluxes, cross-cultural interaction, political alliances, syncretic cosmologies, and linguistic change against a background of violently uprooted lives and livelihoods. Assimilated populations pushed spatial and social boundaries by innovating institutions and practices while creating their own autonomous institutions and identities. They tend to escape precise definition, given the terminology associated with them, illustrated by mostly derogatory idiom based upon birthplace (*crionlo*, born in the colony or on a plantation) or *filhos/brancos da terra* or *filhos do país* (‘whites’ born in a colony), by miscegenation (*mestiço* or *mulato*), colour (*pardo*, brown), or dress (*negros calçados*, shoe-wearing negroes), and *calçinbas* (Africans wearing European dress) (Ferreira 2012; Matos 2012; Almeida 2004). Terminology including hybrid, syncretic, intermediate, transethnic and transcultural idiom evoked processes of cultural assimilation, acculturation, inculturation, transculturation, miscegenation and marronage, and the underlying agency of intermediaries, brokers, middlemen or go-betweens.

The remarkable spatial and social mobility, and cultural creativity of populations caught up in the imperial maelstrom, was interpreted by metropolitan civil and religious

authorities as a cause of deviance and disarray. The perceived threat to the existing political, economic, and religious order inspired measures to counter the subversion of social boundaries (Eriksen 2019; Mintz & Price 1992). The resilience of creolized groups and their capacity to adapt to, resist, and circumvent colonial rule, as well as their economic and cultural autonomy within and beyond colonial frontiers was frowned upon. Crucially, they were accused by state and the Church as acting as agents of Africanization, leaving colonial societies at the mercy of a free, ‘mulatto’ descendance (Alencastro 2012: 75-77) that intermarried, (re-)Africanized, spoke African languages, and adhered to syncretic beliefs (Ferreira 2006: 29-36).

Hence, metropolitan and colonial civil and religious authorities intervened to curb upward social mobility, enacting different strategies whose efficacy proved to be limited or counterproductive. For example, the widely practiced forced exile of condemned criminals, *degredados*, to insular and continental locations, which was meant to ‘whiten’ the population, actually promoted creolization and acculturation. Over the centuries, men and women were forcibly exiled from Portugal, but also from other colonial destinations such as Cabo Verde, to Guinea, STP, and Angola. The latter became a preferential destination for civil and religious authorities, including the Inquisition, especially following the partial occupation of the coastal zone in the 1600s contributing to processes of miscegenation and transculturation (Pantoja 2004; Kananoja 2010). Similar efforts were made in Cabo Verde (Cabral 2015; Brooks 2006; Fernandes 2000) as well as in Angola when *pardo* (coloured) families were imported from Brazil (Alencastro 2012: 77) without any substantial effect.

Another avenue towards social integration in empire was baptism and conversion through Christianization. From an identity perspective, the conversion of slaves and freepersons has been branded as a process of acculturation, continuity, and resistance (Sweet 2003; Thornton 1998a). Missionaries’ proselytization along the west African coast focused on converting populations in the *praças* and African societies. Vertical conversion strategies by Jesuit, Capuchin, and Franciscan orders centered on African dignitaries, such as paramount chiefs (*sobas* in Angola, *régulos* in Guinea), both on the Upper Guinea coast and in Angola (Bethencourt 2017; Horta 2014; Mark 1999; Thornton 1998a), for political and economic reasons. In the Guinea-Bissau region, Catholic missionaries contrived to counter the efforts of Muslim clerics who roamed the interior seeking to convert coastal ‘animist’ populations with the expansion of Mande and Fulbe states (Mota 2013). Missionaries were acutely aware of the widespread impact of processes of ‘mandingization,’ which has been associated with pre-colonial processes of ‘primary creolization’ (Trajano Filho 2007). The

pre-colonial Kongo Kingdom also became the site for cross-cultural interaction, religious syncretism, and cosmopolitanism from the late 1400s onwards, as its rulers assimilated Christian beliefs, symbols, and practices into existing African cults and cosmologies (Bostoen and Brinkman 2018; Thornton 2001). Besides persecuting Sephardim, missionaries in the service of the Portuguese Inquisition also targeted members of Christianized Afro-Atlantic strata for their adherence to ‘African rites.’ Witnesses’ testimonies in Guinea and Angola provide ample insight into syncretic beliefs and practices which “were deeply intertwined with people’s everyday lives” (Green, Havik and Silva 2021: lxi; Kananoja 2010: 465). Incoming private traders and freepersons acted as agents of transculturation, adopting syncretic identities and customs in continental Afro-Atlantic contexts (Newitt 2017; Nafafé 2015; Horta 2014; Seibert 2012; Mark and Horta 2011: 83-102; Dias 2002; Horta 2000; Mark 1999). African societies adopted and re-signified religious divinities, objects, rituals, and dress to enhance the social status and prosperity of chiefly lineages (Mota 2013: 56-60). The emergence of syncretic cosmologies, such as antonianism led by Beatriz Kimpa Vita in the eighteenth-century Kongo Kingdom and the *Novo Deus* (the new God) in Portuguese Guinea in the late 1800s, demonstrates the relevance of endogenous female agency and imagery in this respect (Thornton 1998b; Havik 2004: 93-95).

A key pathway to gaining social legitimacy in empire was recognition of paternity by European or Creole land-owning strata, such as *brancos da terra* progenitors in insular territories such as the Cabo Verde Islands and STP. As a result, ‘illegitimate’ offspring of European planters and traders with African mothers, freepersons, or manumitted slaves could rise to positions of influence, wealth, and respect in local town councils, institutions that Charles Boxer regarded as the cornerstones of imperial rule (Cabral 2013: 145-146). Membership of civil and religious organizations—such as the all-important militias and military orders, Catholic orders, brotherhoods, and sisterhoods—were crucial to further their integration into ‘colonial’ hierarchies (Green 2012b). Manumission could provide slaves with avenues toward social recognition and control over assets through marriage, crafts, and linguistic skills, which were facilitated by authorities in the archipelagos from the 1500s (Monteiro 2016; Cabral 2013; Caldeira 2008). This was not necessarily the case in continental areas; whereas Portuguese authorities exercised territorial control in part of coastal Angola, the Kingdom of Kongo retained its autonomy until the mid-1800s, while African societies controlled the Guinean interior until the early 1900s.

In the Afro-Atlantic *praças*, social mobility was largely controlled by creolized trading lineages which emerged with the Afro-Atlantic trade. From the late 1500s, Creole, Sephardi,

and free African strata sought to combine private commercial interests with land titles and the exercise of (local) public office. Boasting a common founder, trading lineages, or patrimonial households, (Trajano Filho 1998: 167-169; Ribeiro 1986) accumulated economic and social capital, forging alliances by intermarriage and partnerships whilst managing networks of mutual support within bounded social hierarchies of relatedness and loyalty (Havik 2017). They emerged in the *praças*, ports, *morgados*, and *roças* in western Africa, constituting key pillars of the Afro-Atlantic slave, goods, and crop trade. Their capacity for incorporating a great variety of free and bonded persons (including skilled household slaves or *ladino*) via marriage, (recognition of) parenthood, adoption, wardship, and apprenticeships would facilitate social mobility and cohesion (Havik 2017: 79). The virtual end of the transatlantic slave trade as a result of its prohibition in Brazil in 1850 (Clarence-Smith 1985: 61-80) led these trading lineages to invest in the emerging plantation economy (peanuts, coffee, cacao, etc.), which would grow rapidly in Angola but failed to take hold in Portuguese Guinea.

During the 1800s, following liberal revolutions and the rivalry between nation states in Europe, two parallel phenomena were to reshape socio-political relations and redraw the boundaries of authority and mobility in what were soon to become continental Portuguese colonial dominions. On the one hand, the pressure mounted on creolized strata to support and assist Portuguese metropolitan authorities in their quest for territorial control. Access to land and crops had become a strategic concern in the scramble for Africa; hence populations were expected to rally round an imaginary Luso-African community of interests under the auspices of the colonial state. Straddling the urban-rural frontier, these strata attempted to leverage their position as landowners, traders, and brokers in the face of the state's concerted attempt to encroach upon their patron-client relations with African societies (Dias 1984). On the other hand, biosocial ideology manifested a resolute rejection of hybridity, miscegenation, and concubinage defining these strata, which would persist until the official embrace of Freyrian Lusotropicalist ideas in the 1950s (Almeida 2004: 45-64). Differentiated population management via the *indigenato* system, which was imposed in the 1870s once the slave trade was abolished, caused racialist and nationalist tropes to become deeply entangled. Besides facilitating the (forcible) large-scale recruitment of African labour, the system also contrived to prevent African upward mobility as well as 'racial degeneration' (Matos 2012: 148-159; Almeida 2004: 65-82). As Portuguese rule was imposed by military and administrative means in the early decades of the 1900s, metropolitan roots and citizenship became the benchmark

for employment, access to land, inheritance, commerce, and education, erecting novel but by no means insuperable barriers for social integration and legitimacy.

Continuity, Instability, and Conflict

The Afro-Atlantic (slave) trade was simultaneously a crucial factor in the ‘production’ of Creoles and cultural transformations, and a key matrix for alliances, rivalries, and conflicts between various colonial actors and groups which depended on it. Hence, extraversion has been identified as a decisive factor in cultural creolization processes, i.e., the external dependency of African societies, plantations, and *praças* and their populations on imported goods (iron, tools, weapons, gunpowder, cloth, alcoholic spirits) which in turn circulated as items of cross-cultural exchange. Assuming the role of gatekeepers, trading lineages, free Africans, and African ruling lineages, states brokered the conditions of extraversion but not without importing instability and entropy as new markets emerged and faded, and political formations waxed and waned (Lindsay 2014).

Diasporic fluxes revealed the malleability of imperial spaces through cross-culturally induced change in the face of the fragility of imperial rule and the ample opportunities to abscond to and beyond its margins. With the establishment of the colonial state in Africa in the 1830s following liberal reforms in Europe, it attempted to tighten its grip on trade, administration, and settlement. The creolized social strata’s fortunes in empire were closely tied to the politico-economic status quo. Whereas their earlier formative period was strongly marked by the volatility of (slave) markets, the emergence of colonial states left them at the mercy of external political institutions. With the abolishment of the slave trade, state-led extraversion put to the test their skill of navigating the political stage. As Miller has shown in the case of Angola, despite attempts to avert their decline, the ‘Luso-African’ strata ended up losing their autonomy in the late eighteenth century first at the hands of merchant capital, and later owing to state intervention and protectionism (Miller 1988: 245-283; also see Corrado 2010; Dias 1984). However, whereas these strata saw themselves as a kind of cosmopolitan nobility just like trade lineages in the Guinean *praças*, their ambivalent identities and strong ties of affinity with indigenous institutions were frowned upon by colonial authorities (Havik 2011: 210; Dias 2002; Trajano Filho 1998).

Despite these barriers set by racial and nationalist tropes, gender and kinship relations were key drivers of cultural creolization throughout proto-colonial and colonial periods (Oliveira 2021; Newitt 2017; Havik 2015 & 2017; Monteiro 2016; Candido and Rodrigues

2015; Candido 2013; Green 2012a; Brooks 2006, 2010; Caldeira 2008; Rodrigues 2003). Since Boxer's seminal lectures on women's roles in Iberian expansion, research has confirmed the key role free African women (the *nharas* and *tungumá* in Guinea and the *donas* in Cabo Verde, STP, and Angola) played in the politics of alliance-building, in investing social capital in expanding trade networks, in property, and in exercising political influence. In demographic terms, free, and bonded women formed a majority in insular and continental settlements throughout the period of the slave trade. Taking advantage of bilineal descent and matrifocal residence patterns among the creolized strata, they would often marry and remarry—with Europeans and non-Europeans—during their lifetime, accumulating wealth and status (Havik 2004). Inter-marriage and partnerships with noblemen, traders, and military/militia officers of Portuguese and Brazilian origin—for example in STP and Angola—extended their access to kin and client networks (Oliveira 2021; Candido 2015; Caldeira 2008). Importantly, they would intermarry with members of other trading or land-owning lineages—among the Creole *morgado* and *filho da terra* lineages in Cabo Verde and STP—thereby guaranteeing their continuity through cycles of marriage, widowhood, and remarriage, aided by women's longevity compared to men. Portuguese succession laws, which allowed women to exercise their legal rights as *cabeça de casal* (head of household), potentially gave widows full control of family assets (Caldeira 2008).

These unions were by no means condoned by imperial civil and religious authorities, owing to African women's purported role in the Africanization of the *praças* and the transgressive nature of concubinage. The periodic attempts to 'whiten' these settlements by importing—voluntarily or forcibly—women from Portugal or Brazil attests to a deep distrust of African women's role as matrix of creolization (Fernandes 2000: 34). In the light of the fragility of Portuguese rule during the 1800s, the bonds of kinship and affinity of women from prominent trading lineages with African chiefly lineages came to be seen as a potential political asset. Their attempt to leverage their social and cultural capital to broker access to land and conflicts with African societies (Oliveira 2021; Candido & Rodrigues 2015; Candido 2013; Havik 2004),] illustrated the relevance of creolization for the consolidation of the colonial economy. Even though the Guinean *praças* had become bastions of colonial rule, the fact that in the 1950s, African mothers were responsible for two thirds of the 'civilized' stratum—with the other third originating from Cabo Verde—showed that they remained the endogenous matrix of the colonial *praças* (Ribeiro 1986: 125-126).

Nevertheless, biosocial markers created legal, religious, and political impediments to the legitimacy and integration of hitherto 'free' populations. The social exclusion and

instability that ensued caused resentment among the population of the *praças* giving rise to dissonant, proto-nationalist sentiments among the ‘hybrid’ strata that felt marginalized (Djaló 2013: 199-218; Corrado 2010, 2008; Trajano Filho 1998; Dias 1984). In the late nineteenth century, journals and pamphlets published by members of the ‘urban Euro-African’ community in Angola—and other Portuguese colonies—demanded social justice for the educated *filhos do país* (sons of the country) and refused to be treated as *indígenas* (natives) (Corrado 2010; Corrado 2008: 159-228). Significant social and political tensions also emerged in Portuguese Guinea between the free urban strata and Cabo Verdean Creoles, who enjoyed privileged access to administration and trade (Havik 2010; Trajano Filho 1998). In Cabo Verde, the *Claridade* movement called for a cultural revival of Creole culture from the mid-1930s, projecting an autonomous regional identity within empire (Fernandes 2000: 69-70).

The granting of Portuguese citizenship to Cabo Verdeans and São Tomeans in 1822 was retracted by the 1838 constitution, which limited citizenship to Luso-descendants, only to be reinstated in 1947. When authorities proposed the introduction of *indigenato* status to the population in STP, the latter protested against the perceived injustice; its violent repression by authorities in 1953, known as the Batepá massacre, precipitated the granting of ‘civilized’ status to islanders. In continental colonies, the *indigenato* system was only abolished in 1961 following the outbreak of armed conflict in Angola (Seibert 2012: 66-67). The legal limbo in which native-born inhabitants of these archipelagos found themselves for more than a century—whilst continental ‘native’ Africans remained trapped within the *indigenato* system and devoid of civil and political rights in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea following the 1926/1927 reforms—illustrates the idiosyncrasies of ‘racialized’ Portuguese imperial politics.

As state-sanctioned immigration increased from the early 1900s and more so after 1945, especially in the case of Angola and Mozambique, long established trading lineages and planter families lost their privileged positions. By the 1950s, it was clear that the policy to facilitate the upward mobility of Africans by means of the intermediate legal category of *assimilados*, introduced with the Colonial Act (1930), had failed. Belated attempts in the 1950s to ‘correct’ the situation by adopting Lusotropicalist ideology (Matos 2012; Almeida 2004: 45-64; Castelo 1999; Corrado 2008: 51-92; Oliveira 1968) praising the alleged Portuguese penchant for adapting to tropical regions and ‘racial mixing,’ signified an apparent repudiation of the “disastrous” consequences of miscegenation (Almeida 2004: 73). However, the wars of liberation that first erupted in Angola in 1961, and thereafter in Guinea (1963) and Mozambique (1964), debunked this ideology as lingering resentment against Portuguese rule resurfaced with a vengeance among urban and rural populations. With the rest of the

continent in the throes of decolonization, local heterogeneous urban creolized elites, often educated in missionary schools, became the vanguard of pan-African nationalist movements. Notwithstanding insular colonies' apparent detachment from the continental wars of liberation, nationalist identities had already taken a firm hold in Cabo Verde, whilst Creole islanders occupied leading positions in the liberation struggle in Guinea-Bissau (Coutinho 2017). While being rapidly embraced by the local population following the end of empire in 1974, calls for the independence of STP typically originated among exponents of the Forro community in exile (Seibert 2012).

Conclusions

West Africa has served here as a key reference for an analysis of a particular cluster of contact zones associated with the Afro-Atlantic encounter, where new social ecologies, institutions, and identities emerged in areas of erstwhile Portuguese presence. The considerable weight of Atlantic historiography and anthropology is palpable in debates on the Lusophone Southern Atlantic. Although processes of creolization and acculturation in empire extended beyond Lusophone spaces and the West-African context—via the slave trade to the Americas and Asia but also to metropolitan Europe—the nature of contact zones differed. Given the great variety of African ecologies, political entities, and socio-cultural contexts in Lusophone areas along the West African coast, they encompass variations also present in Anglophone or Francophone spaces. The major singularity of the former being the formation of insular Creole societies in Cabo Verde and STP—establishing theoretical and empirical bridges with the Caribbean—and their key role in the Lusophone 'Brown' Atlantic (Almeida 2000: 29-32).

In terms of contact zones, the Indian Ocean World differed from the Atlantic owing to the former's long-standing maritime trade networks, contact zones (e.g. the Swahili coast), and complex cross-cultural networks which operated previous to the arrival of Europeans (Newitt 2017: 474-478). But, given that these regional systems, dominated by the slave trade, were linked by Portuguese, Brazilian, and African actors, similarities between the emergence of Creoles and modes of acculturation become apparent. Insular Creole societies, such as Reunion or Mauritius, suggest parallels with Cabo Verde and STP (Berthet et al. 2019: 6-7), whereas encounters in Mozambique and the 'indianization' of creolized communities share common traits with Brazilian influence in West Africa (Newitt 2017: 277; Guran 2000).

Nonetheless, the social and cultural institutions, their organization, hierarchies, and practices in these contact zones were quite distinct, giving rise to the formation of Creole societies in Cabo Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe on the one hand, and to diverse trans-cultural dynamics in the *praças* and Afro-Atlantic settlements scattered along the West African coast on the other hand. In the process, Creole languages with a Portuguese lexicon emerged in Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, and the Guinea-Bissau region, but none in Angola. Emerging out of a myriad of diasporic and endogenous threads, the infinite diversity of cross-cultural interactions in constant flux (Eriksen 2007: 169-171) cannot therefore be contained or subsumed within Lusophone or Luso-African boundaries.

Opposition to perceived Africanization and its close association with the purported subversive impact of hybrid social groups forms a key thread of the centuries of Portuguese imperial history. Another strand, namely the ineffective and often counter-productive measures taken to curb these phenomena, was related to the chronic lack of human and material resources of a maritime and colonial empire permanently stretched beyond its limits. Tensions simmered and surfaced throughout the centuries, coming to a head with the abolition of the slave trade and imposition of the colonial state, leading creolized groups to express nativist sentiments in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea (Madeira 2015: 137-144). Their loss of influence translated into (proto-) nationalist claims of social autonomy and exclusivity, as they distanced themselves from European and African traditions. Owing to the limited availability of self-narratives by creolized groups, at least for the first centuries of Afro-Atlantic exchange, civil and religious imperial tropes tend to dominate. In the case of the Portuguese empire, this bias was further reinforced by the *Estado Novo* (New State) dictatorship's (1926-1974) fierce repression of (proto-) nationalist sentiment. National liberation discourse that has been likened to a subversive "creole ideology" (Newitt 2017: 481) serves as a reminder of these strata's pivotal role in late Portuguese colonialism, liberation movements and decolonization.

A comparative perspective on cross-cultural interaction inspired the study of processes of creolization in different parts of the globe but was slow to transform into an autonomous topic of scientific research. The diversity of processes—from insular Creole societies (Cabo Verde, STP) to cultural creolization in the Afro-Atlantic settlements (Guinea and Angolan coasts)—is reflected in different approaches (historical, anthropological, linguistic) in accordance with the contact zones under consideration. An overriding element in this discussion is that of entangled histories connecting diverse cultural landscapes was shaped by imperial but largely determined by endogenous agency. Predominantly occurring

in liminal spaces on the margins of empire, supported by oral self-narratives couched in local vernacular, they often escaped the purview of imperial institutions, like a ‘thirdspace’ lost in translation (Hall 2015). Thus, by leaving traces in the present, they may appear as the result of fragmentary encounters, more akin to forms of cultural pidginization or *creolage* rather than as a part of cross-cultural change in the *longue durée*. A recognition of this unfinished historical continuum unbounded by temporal or spatial confines highlights the need for articulating these transformative dynamics in different contact zones in a comparative, trans-disciplinary perspective (Knörr & Trajano Filho 2018).

In terms of the cross-cultural dynamics discussed above, three key threads stand out: migration and diaspora; social mobility and change; and social tensions and conflict. Protracted forced and voluntary migration fostered regional and global diasporic networks, heterogenous social formations and unstable hybrid identities which epitomize the “open-ended, flexible and unbounded nature of cultural processes” (Eriksen 2007: 163). The multiplicity of trajectories and strategies of cosmopolitan ‘Luso-Creole elites’ and their capacity for self-promotion, mediation and making alliances underpinned their longevity in Cabo Verde, STP, Guinea-Bissau and Angola, both in empire and the post-colony (Knörr & Trajano Filho 2018; Kohl 2018; Schubert 2017; Oliveira 2015; Djaló 2013; Seibert 2006). Underlying inequalities and tensions in empire along racial, ethnic, class, and gender lines gave rise to these groups themselves and often elusive transcultural phenomena—which failed to neatly fit into imperial tropes—and decisively shaped the singularity of the contact zones under consideration as well as their uneven and fractious evolution and decolonization.

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