

Healers, Idolaters, and Good Christians: A Case Study of Creolization and Popular Religion in Mid- Eighteenth Century Angola*

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On November 14, 1750, the prison of the Inquisition in Lisbon opened its gates to a curious entourage. João Pereira da Cunha, a former *capitão-mor* or captain-major of Ambaca, located in the Portuguese colony of Angola, had been imprisoned on the orders of the King after charges against him had been presented to the Inquisition.¹ He was accused of witchcraft and idolatry, a heavy charge for a man who was an esteemed military commander in Angola and a member of the Order of Christ. Catarina Juliana, an African woman from Angola and Cunha's concubine, was also captured on the same charges. In their company ten Central African slaves of various origins, owned by Cunha, were put in prison. The *processos* or trials that followed the arrival of this group in Lisbon took a decade and a half to complete as the Inquisitors pressed for more information from witnesses in Angola and interrogated the accused who were held in prison.² These

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¹ There are no all-embracing studies of the Inquisition in Angola, although studies based on Inquisition sources have been published. See, for example, Selma Pantoja, "Inquisição, degredo e mestiçagem em Angola no século XVIII," *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões* 3, 5/6 (2004), 117–36; José da Silva Horta, "Africanos e portugueses na documentação inquisitorial, de Luanda a Mbanza Kongo (1596–1598)," in *Actas do Seminário Encontro de povos e culturas em Angola* (Lisbon: Comissão Nacional para as Comemorações dos Descobrimentos Portugueses, 1997), 301–21. Religious practices in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Angola are discussed in James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); John K. Thornton, "Religious and Ceremonial Life in the Kongo and Mbundu Areas, 1500–1700," in Linda M. Heywood, ed., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 71–90; John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

² The *processos* in question are housed in the collection of *Tribunal do Santo Officio/Inquisição de Lisboa* in the Portuguese National Archives, *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* (hereafter TSO/IL, ANTT), *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).

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processos offer a wealth of information on mid-eighteenth century Angola and especially on religious life both in the interior as well as in Luanda, although great care must be taken when reassessing the veracity of the accusations that were expressed against João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana.³

The *processos* also reveal a great deal about the extent of creolization in eighteenth-century Angola. Linda Heywood and John Thornton have recently, in various publications, argued that social life in Central Africa during the era of the slave trade was characterized by intimate contacts between African and Portuguese individuals that affected not only religious life but also cultural practices such as naming patterns, musical traditions, foodways, clothing styles, and housing.⁴ The evidence presented in this article confirms some of the arguments made by Heywood and Thornton, and also sheds new light on the cultural interaction between Central Africans and the Portuguese. Creolization was evident from the first time accusations against Cunha and his concubine were voiced. Two differing cultures were constantly in contact and in communication in the family life of João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana. Both sides of this cultural exchange were equally affected.

According to Linda Heywood, a Creole culture had emerged by the beginning of the eighteenth century in Portuguese Angola. Creolization was a process that affected not only African culture and peoples. The phenomenon also resulted in the Africanization of Portuguese settlers and their culture. As Heywood has argued, the Portuguese encountered no difficulties in adapting to a dominant African cultural environment, and Central Africans were adept at selectively integrating elements of European culture into their own

³ There is a growing literature on Africans condemned by the Portuguese Inquisition. Most of the Africans condemned for magical practices were slaves and free blacks living in Portugal or Brazil. Daniela Buono Calainho, *Metrópole das mandingas: Religiosidade negra e inquisição portuguesa no antigo regime* (Rio de Janeiro: Garamond, 2008) and "Jambacousses e gangazambes: feiticeiros negros em Portugal," *Afro-Ásia* 25–26 (2001), 141–76; James E. Wadsworth, "Jurema and Batuque: Indians, Africans, and the Inquisition in Colonial Northeastern Brazil," *History of Religions* 46, 2 (2006), 140–62; Laura de Mello e Souza, "Revisitando o calundu," in Lina Gorenstein and Maria Luiza Tucci Carneiro, eds., *Ensaio sobre a intolerância: Inquisição, Marranismo e Anti-Semitismo* (São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas, 2005), 295–319 and *The Devil and the Land of the Holy Cross: Witchcraft, Slavery, and Popular Religion in Colonial Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Didier Lahon, "Inquisição, pacto com o demônio e "magia" africana em Lisboa no século XVIII," *Topoi* 5, 8 (2004), 9–70; Timothy Walker, "Sorcerers and Folkhealers: Africans and the Inquisition in Portugal (1680–1800)," *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões* 3, 5/6 (2004), 83–98; Donald Ramos, "A influência africana e a cultura popular em Minas Gerais: um comentário sobre a interpretação da escravidão," in Maria Beatriz Nizza da Silva, ed., *Brasil: colonização e escravidão* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 2000), 142–62; Luiz Mott, "O calundu-angola de Luiza Pinta: Sabará, 1739," *Revista do Instituto de Arte e cultura* 1 (1994), 73–82.

⁴ Linda M. Heywood, "Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth-Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Cultures," in Heywood, ed., *Central Africans*, 91–113; John K. Thornton, "Central Africa in the Era of the Slave Trade," in Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson, eds., *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 83–110; Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

cultural fabric. Biological and cultural intermixture was significant in the cities of Luanda and Benguela and the areas around the military forts in the interior. Heywood has shown that the Portuguese and Brazilian-born residents in Angola and their white and Luso-African offspring were linked to the larger African population through a series of complex economic, military, political, cultural, and familial ties. All these people participated in the Creole culture.⁵

The religious identity of Central Africans comes under close scrutiny in this article. James Sweet has questioned the depth of Catholic identity among Central Africans, or more specifically, among Christians in the Kingdom of Kongo. Sweet presumes that the “broad Central African cosmology” remained the dominant religious paradigm for most Kongoese even when they were baptized Catholics.⁶ This case, however, suggests that there is little reason to see either Christianity or indigenous African religious beliefs as a dominant aspect of an individual’s religious identity. Both were equally viable and led to syncretic religious practices among Central Africans. The inquisitors examined these practices in depth. Although they found that João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana had relied on African healers, they also found ample evidence of their Catholic devotion.

“In His House and Garden They Adore False Idols”: From Accusations to Arrest

In April 1746, the prosecutor of the ecclesiastical court of the bishopric of Angola started to write down denunciations against João Pereira da Cunha, the captain-major of the *presidio* of Ambaca,⁷ who was suspected of “many superstitions” that went against Catholic doctrines and that were also popular among the “pagans” (*gentios*) of the *Reino de Angola*,⁸ 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. It was claimed that three African sorcerers or witches (*magicos, feiticeiros*) stayed on certain occasions in Cunha’s house in Ambaca. It was implied that Catarina, who in these early denunciations is sometimes called João Pereira da Cunha’s slave, was the instigator of the presence of these sorcerers in Cunha’s household.⁹

The denunciation described in detailed fashion how the sorcerers had made certain whistles from beaks for João Pereira to carry around his neck. It was claimed that by

⁵ Heywood, “Portuguese into African,” 91–96.

⁶ Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 112–15.

⁷ Ambaca was the largest and most populated of the inland districts in the colony of Angola. Its capital was a *presidio*, a fort manned by a token garrison. Jan Vansina, “Ambaca Society and the Slave Trade c. 1760–1845,” *Journal of African History* 46, 1 (2005), 2.

⁸ *Reino de Angola* was the area regarded by the Portuguese as their conquered realm although Lisbon exercised only a loose influence over its claimed dominion. In practice, the *Reino* included the city of Luanda and the areas around the military forts of Muxima, Ambaca, Massangano, Cambambe, and Pungo Andongo. In the eighteenth century, the *Reino de Angola* was distinguished from *Reino de Benguela*, the city of Benguela and the fort of Caconda and the immediate area around these settlements. Heywood, “Portuguese into African,” 95.

⁹ Proc. 9691, 6–6v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

blowing a whistle he could kill anyone he wished, even from a great distance. The black sorcerers had mixed certain roots and herbs with water and washed the *capitão-mor* with it, in order to protect him from misfortune. They had also brought figures made of wood to Cunha's house. These idols were "consulted" about Cunha's private affairs. Witnesses also claimed that the suspect had walked around in his garden dressed in leopard skins to which animal claws and teeth had been attached; that the sorcerers put a spell on the letters that Cunha wrote in order to achieve the things that were mentioned in the letters; and that Cunha sat watching as the blacks played their drums in his garden and roasted lizards. One denunciation also made a reference to a spirit named Kibuku, which took possession of one of Cunha's slaves. This spirit possessed a *parda*¹⁰ woman when the sorcerers played various instruments and then helped the *capitão-mor* conduct his business more successfully.¹¹

The Canon of Ambaca recorded six more denunciations in July 1748. These all came from soldiers serving in Ambaca. Their contents were almost identical and said that João Pereira da Cunha was an enemy of the Faith, had little or no fear of God, and had publicly used magic during the entire period he had presided in Ambaca. Interestingly, no mention of the three African sorcerers was found in any of the accounts, but there was 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 mentioned three African spirits that were adored by João Pereira da Cunha. Along with the aforementioned Kibuku, these were named 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. A *Xinguila*, or a spirit medium, was mentioned alongside these spirits. It was claimed that Cunha's former slave, Marsela, had received one of these spirits in her head and the spirit had spoken through her mouth. Marsela had later passed away, but Catarina was also a *xinguila*. In fact, Catarina, who "always was his concubine," was claimed to be the one responsible for the care of the spirits. Cunha also had a goat, which the witnesses claimed was adored as Gangazumba.¹²

As if these circumstances were not aggravating enough, there were further accusations leveled against João Pereira da Cunha. According to witnesses, he had buried one of his *ladina*¹³ slaves in Bembeje without attending to the Christian rites. On one occasion, he had risen to defend a black witch named João Pedro, *xinguila* of a spirit called Macongo. When the *xinguila* in question was brought to Ambaca along with a sack

¹⁰ *Pardo/parda* was a generic term used in Angola and Brazil for anyone of apparent mixed ancestry. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Introduction: Enslaving Connections and the Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery," in José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds. *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil during the Era of Slavery* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2004), 12.

¹¹ Proc. 9691, 7–10v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

¹² Proc. 9691, 12–22, TSO/IL, ANTT.

¹³ *Ladinolladina* referred to acculturated slaves, who spoke Portuguese and were baptized. Usually they had been born in the households of the Portuguese and Afro-Portuguese. Heywood, "Portuguese into African," 95.

containing whistles and other charms, Cunha had defended him and said that the objects in question were not fetishes. Cunha was then referred to as a “defender of all black witches.” According to the witnesses, Cunha had an accomplice in a white man named Felipe Dias Chaves, “a great witch, who also uses the same arts” as João Pereira da Cunha.¹⁴

Whoever devised these accusations was either well informed about the course of events in João Pereira da Cunha’s household or well versed in Central African religious life. As John Thornton has shown, full consensus or religious orthodoxy never prevailed in Central Africa, but from contemporary sources it is possible to outline some widely held beliefs. One of these was a belief in a variety of spiritual beings residing in the Other World. Religious worship involved, on the one hand, remote and powerful spirits or deities, and on the other hand the souls of the recently dead ancestors of the living. The deities were typically called *kilundu* in the Mbundu region, and worship was directed to territorial deities.¹⁵ The deities that the witnesses referred to were very popular among the local population in the Ambaca district. Kibuku, the deity that supposedly brought Cunha luck in his business transactions, in the conduct of the slave trade, was known in Ambaca as a spirit of good fortune. For the entrepreneurs this was also the god of wealth. Local African leaders were constantly preoccupied with their Kibuku, frequently invoked it and promptly observed the requirements of this spirit.¹⁶ Muta, or Muta Kalombo, was venerated in Ambaca as a personal spirit related to hunting, warfare, and fire.¹⁷ It was especially venerated among African soldiers who served in the Portuguese armies. Thus, it was probably well known at least to the soldiers who denounced Cunha.

Gangazumba could refer to Ganga ya Zumbi, which was described by the Capuchin Father Cavazzi in the mid-seventeenth century as a priest of the spirit and soul. *Zumbi* were the recently dead and it was believed that their discontented spirits caused illness in the living. Ritual specialists, *ngangas*, mediated these spirits and helped people to appease them. To placate a *zumbi*, an offering was often ordered by the *ngangas*.¹⁸ However, according to an Inquisition document that describes “pagan rites” in Angola, Gangazumba was also applied there as a generic term to denote various magical practices that were used both to kill and to “give life,” i.e., to heal people, and to invoke hatred or love.¹⁹ While Gangazumba was allegedly a spiritual entity that gave João Pereira da Cunha the power to

¹⁴ Proc. 9691, 12–22, TSO/IL, ANTT.

¹⁵ John K. Thornton, “Religious and Ceremonial,” 75–76.

¹⁶ Vansina, “Ambaca Society,” 25.

¹⁷ This spirit had already been mentioned by the Capuchin priest Serafim de Cortona in 1656, in a letter written from Massangano. Giovanni António Cavazzi da Montecucolo, *Descrição Histórica dos Três Reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola*, trans. and ed. Graziano Maria da Legguzzano (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1965), II, 234.

¹⁸ Giovanni António Cavazzi da Montecucolo, *Araldi Manuscript: Missione evangelica al regno de Congo... (1665–1668)*, trans. and ed. John K. Thornton (available online <http://centralafricanhistory.blogspot.com>), Book I, 84–85.

¹⁹ Ritos gentílicos de Angola, Livro 272, 123v, Tribunal do Santo Ofício/Conselho Geral (hereafter TSO/CG), ANTT.

take life from his enemies, it is more than likely that Gangazumba referred to the ritual specialists who helped the *capitão-mor* recuperate from sickness. It is probable that the witnesses simply took a term they had heard used and either guessed at or distorted its meaning.

Seeking help from healers and spirit mediums was far from rare among the Luso-African population in eighteenth-century Angola, as other cases that were denounced to the Inquisition show. Besides the great territorial deities, religious space was dominated by the ancestors, whose sphere of activity was their descendants rather than entire regions and territories.²⁰ One Inquisition denunciation from the 1720s in Angola describes how spirits of the dead were thought to cause illness. In Benguela, Captain Antonio de Freitas was accused of publicly using African healing rituals. The rituals included adoration of a goat and the sacrifice of a calf. It was said that Freitas was following the advice of a *feiticeiro* from Dombe in order to heal himself from an infirmity, presumably hernia. The witnesses explained that the rituals were conducted in honor of Freitas' deceased wife, because it was said that her soul was wandering without peace, or in other words was a *zumbi*.²¹

“The Most Observant Catholic Who Entered the Sertão”: João Pereira da Cunha’s Defense

In December 1748, the Bishop of Angola, Dom Frei Manuel de Santa Inês, sent the denunciation from Luanda to the Inquisition of Lisbon. He reasoned that the handling of the crimes described in the denunciation exceeded the faculties of the religious officials in Angola, and thus he expected prosecutors in Lisbon to take charge of the matter.²² João Pereira da Cunha had returned to Luanda at this point, and quickly composed a letter of defense. Unsurprisingly, Cunha denied all accusations. According to Cunha, his troubles started when he fell into disfavor during the reign of the previous Bishop, Dom Frei António do Desterro Malheiros. Cunha claimed that his fall from grace was the result of his denying porters to Father Gonçalo de Gouveia on his way to Kasanje. But real trouble started when a man named Fernando Martins de Amaral, Cunha's sworn enemy, decided to fabricate a denunciation against him. The reason for Amaral's hatred of Cunha was that Amaral, who had been banished from Brazil to Benguela, had committed a murder in Kasanje. As *capitão-mor* of Ambaca, Cunha had conducted the investigation against Amaral and found him guilty. In vengeance, Amaral had instigated others to testify against Cunha.²³

Five witnesses were brought forward to defend Cunha. They all resided in Luanda and all except one were officials in the military. They all probably just repeated what they had been ordered to say, retelling what Cunha had already said in his statement. Fernando Martins de Amaral had been responsible for the fabricated accusations. Amaral had been a good friend of the former Bishop, António do Desterro, and was able to influence other

²⁰ Thornton, “Religious and Ceremonial Life,” 79.

²¹ Pantoja, “Inquisição, degredo,” 124–28.

²² Proc. 9691, 23, TSO/IL, ANTT.

²³ Proc. 9691, 24–26, TSO/IL, ANTT.

priests to take up his cause against Cunha. Some of the witnesses who had already given their statement against Cunha had allegedly been enticed by gifts such as barrels of sugar cane brandy (*gerebita*) to denounce Amaral's enemy. It was claimed that one witness named Manoel Correa Leitão²⁴ had been forced by his father to denounce Cunha. It is worth noting that among the four initial witnesses, he was the only one who had admitted that his knowledge was hearsay. Another witness, whose statement was deemed false by those who defended Cunha, was Gabriel Neto Nogueira. He too was an enemy of the *capitão-mor* because Cunha had denied him porters when he sought to transport his trade goods to Kasanje.²⁵

The claim that the denial of porters was a reason for someone's hatred against Ambaca's captain-major is not surprising. Assigning porters to inland traders was a question in which *capitães-mores* constantly intervened, especially in the eighteenth century.²⁶ There was immense demand for bearers in Ambaca as the *presidio* occupied such a central position in the logistics of the slave trade. Trade goods were transported from Luanda by slaves as far as Massangano, and from there the same slaves or other porters impressed at Massangano ascended the Lukala River Valley as far as Ambaca. The long journey from Ambaca to Kasanje depended on acquiring new carriers from the *capitão-mor* of Ambaca. According to Miller, the captain-majors of Ambaca acted as local brokers and provided porters only to their friends or to those merchants who were willing to pay dearly for their cooperation. They ordered the local *sobas* or leaders of the district's chiefdoms to send specified numbers of men to the caravans' assembly point, punishing any who failed to comply with their orders. In this way, the captain-majors were able to commandeer the best trade goods as bribes from Luanda merchants desperate for their collaboration.²⁷

The men who spoke in Cunha's favor also give us a glimpse of what was expected of a good Catholic in mid-eighteenth century Luanda. Cunha fulfilled their expectations in terms of being "very fearful of God and observant of the laws of His Majesty, of the precepts of the Church and very devoted to Our Lady of Sorrows." Cunha always carried an image of Our Lady of Sorrows around his neck, and participated in the activities of the Brotherhood of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia*,²⁸ at some point having served as the Brotherhood's treasurer. One witness named him "the most observant Catholic who

²⁴ A decade later, Leitão made a famous expedition to Kasanje, authoring a manuscript published in Evá Sebestyén and Jan Vansina, "Angola's Eastern Hinterland in the 1750s: A Text Edition and Translation of Manoel Correia Leitão's "Voyage" (1755–1756)," *History in Africa* 26 (1999), 299–364.

²⁵ Proc. 9691, 26v–35v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

²⁶ Carlos Couto, *Os capitães-mores em Angola no século XVIII (subsídio para o estudo da sua actuação)* (Luanda: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, 1972), 230–37.

²⁷ Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 266–67.

²⁸ The *Misericórdia* of Luanda is described in António Brasio, "As Misericórdias de Angola," *Studia* 4 (1959), 107–34.

entered the backlands (*sertão*).²⁹ These characteristics were of course cited to create a positive impression of Cunha's character for the Inquisitors, but they also constituted a list of ideal behavior that was expected of Portuguese administrators and merchants in Angola. However, very few people lived up to these expectations if we are to believe the observations of metropolitan-born Portuguese officials. As Heywood has argued, the religious practices and moral standing of the local community came under heavy criticism. The Catholic heritage of the Portuguese and Brazilian-born colonists underwent a great deal of Africanization and many Europeans participated openly in non-Christian rites that had come to dominate religious practices in the church. In 1736, Governor Rodrigues de Meneses had written to Lisbon, complaining that not only Africans, but also whites exercise "superstitions and diabolic rites." Similar complaints continued throughout the eighteenth century.³⁰

Cunha's most extraordinary feat for which he was given credit, and which he also cited in his own defense, was that instead of employing African rituals he had succeeded in eradicating two popular customs in the *presidio* of Ambaca. He never explained exactly how he had achieved this but he noted that the ecclesiastics in the area had never succeeded in doing so. The customs that Cunha and his exponents referred to were *upanda* and *mbulungo*. Both were instruments of customary law, or civil law as understood by the Mbundu, and applied in the courts of the *sobas*. *Upanda* meant the right to claim a penalty for adultery. It was often used in Angola to penalize those who had intimate relations with someone's wife or concubine. These cases were settled by imposing heavy fines on the culprit.³¹ *Mbulungo* was an ordeal by poison and well known in Central Africa.³² Cavazzi, who described various ordeals enacted in Angola in the mid-seventeenth century, explained that *mbulungo* was conducted by an oracle who mixed a variety of powders of special herbs and woods with powdered snakes, fruits of various trees and plants in a calabash or vase into a concoction that was then given to suspects. If they survived the ordeal, they were deemed innocent.³³ Dom Luis Simões Brandão, who was the Bishop of Angola in the early eighteenth century, also described *mbulungo*, noting that in excessive quantity the poison caused brain damage and killed the culprit. The oracles or *ngangas* who administered the ritual controlled the amount of poison they gave to each suspect.³⁴

²⁹ Proc. 9691, 26v–35v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

³⁰ Heywood, "Portuguese into African," 98–101.

³¹ António de Oliveira de Cadornega, *História Geral das Guerras Angolanas*, ed. Manuel Alves da Cunha (Lisbon: Agência Geral das Colónias, 1972), III, 269.

³² Cunha himself and most of his witnesses used the term *golungo*, while the last witness Roque Ferreira de Vasconcellos used *bulungo*. These signified the same thing. Another source describes *golungo* as an ordeal used both by blacks and whites in order to find out who committed a certain crime. *Ritos gentílicos de Angola*, Livro 272, 123, TSO/CG, ANTT.

³³ Cavazzi, Araldi Manuscript, I, 82–83; Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica*, I, 105–106. Cadornega, *História Geral*, III, 320–21, gave a similar description.

³⁴ "Ritos gentílicos, e superstições, que observão os negros do gentio do Reyno de Angola desde o seu nascimento athe a morte," *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* 5–6 (1885), 372.

There is no reason to believe that João Pereira da Cunha really succeeded in suppressing these customs, which were deeply ingrained in the Mbundu social order in Ambaca. *Upanda* was mentioned in a decree to the *capitães-mores* in 1765 as being excluded from their jurisdiction. It was still described by Portuguese soldiers a hundred years later in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁵ *Mbulungo* excited the Portuguese to a considerably greater extent. Manoel Correa Leitão attempted to suppress it in Kasanje in 1755.³⁶ In a decree to the *capitães-mores*, Governor Sousa Coutinho condemned the ritual in 1765. However, the Portuguese never succeeded in suppressing the poison ordeals. At best, when they were suppressed in one place, they continued to flourish in another, and *mbulungo* was still being practiced in Angola in the nineteenth century.³⁷ Cunha was clearly trying to impress the Inquisitors and to convince them that he was a devout Christian and defender of the Faith. One can only imagine the consequences that the suppression of these customs, lucrative to those who were involved in them, would have led to in Ambaca. It would certainly have damaged Cunha's relations with the local *sobas*, and there is no reason to assume that this was the case. It is more plausible to postulate that the mention of these customs in Cunha's letter of defense only shows that both were popular in Ambaca society.

“Has Gained Great Advances, Succeeding Well in Everything”: The Search for Clues

Almost nine months passed before the documentation reached Lisbon and was previewed by the Inquisitors on September 5, 1749. The summary listed the contents of the denunciations and noted that the accused had presented a petition in which he swore his innocence and asked the Inquisition to investigate the truth about his conduct.³⁸ The Inquisitors decided to press the case on the grounds of the denunciations and the seriousness of the accusations. If the accusations were true, the Inquisitors reasoned that Cunha and his associates had adored the demon and this adoration had given Cunha advances in business and even powers to kill his competitors. Another motivation for pressing the charges was that Cunha's “pernicious example in straying to these [adorations], him being the principal secular person of that *presidio*, could be the origin of the total ruin of Christianity” in Ambaca. Had the Inquisitors been willing to look at things from another perspective, they would have given at least as high a probability to Cunha's claim that the accusations were false. One is struck by a clause in the summary that states Cunha had gained great advances and succeeded well in his business. This opens up the possibility that accusations were motivated only by envy and ill will.³⁹

³⁵ Vansina, “Ambaca Society,” 11.

³⁶ Kasanje was known for its famous *induuu* oracle and visited by people from all over Central Africa. Sebestyén and Vansina, “Angola's Eastern Hinterland,” 338–39.

³⁷ Vansina, “Ambaca Society,” 11.

³⁸ Proc. 9691, 37–38v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

³⁹ This was not rare in Angola and Brazil, where economic success often led to a denunciation to the Inquisition, the most prosperous merchants being accused of being Jews. Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O Trato dos Viventes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000), 25.

An investigation regarding Cunha's personality was conducted in Luanda, in which eleven esteemed members of the Luanda establishment, all of them serving in the military, expressed their opinion of their colleague. The image proffered by these characterizations was ambiguous. Some claimed that Cunha had led a respectable life, behaved honorably and was capable of handling important matters, such as the business of the Inquisition. However, most informants described him as a dubious character. It was claimed that his fortune had been assembled with a "very bad conscience." Many implied that he had used magic in amassing his capital. Catarina Juliana, whom Cunha had bought from *Sargento-mor* or Sergeant-major Cypriano da Silva Rocha, was also mentioned and it was said that she had introduced various magic tricks to Cunha. Many of these allegations were based on hearsay and gleaned from those who had originally denounced Cunha.⁴⁰

Cunha was not married, but it was noted that he had two concubines. Nobody seemed to know his exact age, but they judged him to be about sixty years old. All knew that he had arrived in Angola as a *degredado*, a deported convict, having committed robbery and murder in Portugal. This can be verified from the list of *degredados* arriving in Luanda. João Pereira da Cunha, born in São Martinho de Leitões, Guimarães, had arrived in Luanda on a ship from Rio de Janeiro on December 18, 1715. At the time he was twenty-five, which would have made him almost sixty at the time of his arrest. He was single and had been convicted of a homicide and sentenced to perpetual deportation in Angola, and to death if he returned to Portugal.⁴¹ He had led an eventful life in Angola, gradually rising to prestigious positions in the military. He had served as a *capitão-mor* for about six years prior to his arrest and amassed a considerable fortune along the way.⁴² But now his life was in the hands of the prosecutors.

Cunha's entourage left Luanda on March 7, 1750.⁴³ Further arrests were made in Ambaca in April when Cunha's accomplices Felipe Dias Chaves, Diogo Dandâ, and Soba Mucori were apprehended. Felipe Dias Chaves died two weeks after his arrest, but in July 1750, Diogo Dandâ and Soba Mucori were sent to Lisbon. The captain of their ship commented that an interpreter would perhaps be needed because the Africans spoke only little Portuguese. It was later revealed that the Portuguese had captured the wrong Soba Mucori. Although the arrested man carried the same title, the *soba* who had been João Pereira da Cunha's accomplice had already died.⁴⁴ Two other arrests were made in Ambaca. João Pedro Macollo and another man were detained and put aboard a ship to Bahia, but the unidentified man died during the voyage. João Pedro Macollo, on the other

⁴⁰ Proc. 9691, 42v-46, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁴¹ Maria Eugénia Martins Vieira, "Registo de Cartas de Guia de Degredados para Angola (1714-1757): Análise de um Códice do Arquivo da Câmara Municipal de Luanda," (Unpublished licentiate thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, 1966), 103.

⁴² On the nomination of captain-majors in eighteenth-century Angola, see Couto, *Os capitães-mores*, 53-64.

⁴³ Proc. 9691, 66, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁴⁴ Proc. 9691, 53-55v, 70, 114v-115, TSO/IL, ANTT.

hand, was never tried and died in June 1756 in Lisbon, after being imprisoned for several years.⁴⁵

João Pedro was the same man, a *xinguila* of a spirit named Macongo, whom Cunha had defended against witchcraft accusations. When the soldiers searched his house they found many items of ritual significance and João Pedro explained to which spirit they pertained. João Pedro owned a buffalo horn filled with black powder, to which two skins and a shell encircled by pieces of bark from a *mulemba* tree had been tied, pertaining to a spirit named Vunji. Ritual objects dedicated to Muta Calombo included a *macua* (calabash shell) and a buffalo tail. However, objects pertaining to Macongo were the most numerous and 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.⁴⁶ Felipe Dias Chaves also owned a *macua* and a buffalo tail, pertaining to Muta Calombo. Further objects dedicated to the same spirit included a belt to which had been attached a leather pouch full of black powder, two small horns, three iron rings and two bones, all “*mandingas*” according to Chaves. Chaves also owned two pouches that contained cards with drawings of demons; a monkey’s skull to “cure headaches”; and black, pale brown, and red powders, all to “cure feet.”⁴⁷ Both men were also found to have containers of *pemba*, white clay, that were reserved for their prayers (*orações*).

All these magic ingredients had a meaning to their owners although they did not explain it in detail. It is striking that both had the same objects that they said pertained to Muta Calombo, namely the *macua* and the buffalo tail. The characteristics of the spirit Macongo are unclear, but it is obvious that João Pedro had a special connection to this spirit, as had been mentioned in the denunciation. Both men also had numerous powders, probably obtained and ground from different herbs and roots and used for healing different illnesses. Perhaps most striking are the different pouches confiscated from Felipe Dias Chaves, and the fact that he said these were “*mandingas*.” This term entered into popular use in the Portuguese colonial world when similar pouches, called *bolsas de mandinga*, began to spread with West African slaves to Brazil and Portugal as protective amulets.⁴⁸ Chaves might have used the “*mandingas*” as protective amulets. There are indications that the use of *bolsas de mandinga* had spread to Angola by the early eighteenth century. In 1715, a black soldier named Vicente de Morais, serving in the fortresses of Muxima and Massangano, had been denounced for carrying a *mandinga* pouch as a protective amulet.⁴⁹

While the prisoners traveled from Angola to Lisbon, Canon Gaspar Borges Cardozo began new hearings in Luanda, following the orders he had received. The

⁴⁵ Proc. 10120, 1, 6, TSO/IL, ANTT; Proc. 9691, 57–57v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁴⁶ Proc. 10120, 9–10, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁴⁷ Proc. 14148, 3–3v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁴⁸ Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 179–85, for examples from Brazil and Portugal.

⁴⁹ Pantoja, “Inquisição, degredo,” 128–31.

Inquisitors wanted all of the eleven witnesses who had originally denounced João Pereira da Cunha to be questioned again.⁵⁰ Cardozo began his work diligently, and by October he had already questioned all except two of the original witnesses.⁵¹ However, these witnesses now named several others, who they claimed could give more information regarding the case. Bringing these people to Luanda took over a year, and the hearings did not recommence until February 1752. The origins of the witnesses indicate the extent of creolization in Angola. Of the nineteen men, only two were born in mainland Portugal. Two others were born on the islands of Madeira and the Azores. All the rest, among them blacks and *pardos*, were either from Luanda or the inland fortresses of Massangano and Ambaca. Even four of the five clerics were born in Angola. According to Heywood, many of the priests and lay people in Angola came from the ranks of Luso-Africans and free blacks. It is no wonder that so many metropolitan administrators and clergymen who arrived in Luanda from Portugal in the eighteenth century commented profusely and negatively on what they saw as the decline of Portuguese cultural values in Angola. In their eyes, Africans and Luso-Africans were raised from infancy “in a licentious life.”⁵²

The witnesses reinforced the story that had already been told, but they also presented new information. First, new spirits were added to the list of objects of Cunha’s adoration. One witness added Macongo to the list of spirits that had been adored in Cunha’s household.⁵³ Another said that, besides Gangazumba and Muta Calombo, Cunha had two Kibukus that he adored.⁵⁴ Secondly, the way these spirits were adored was clarified. According to various descriptions, Cunha kneeled before the idols and talked submissively in front of them. Participants in these rituals clapped their hands and played drums and other instruments, and Cunha received responses from the idols to his requests and questions. Thirdly, new names were added to the list of suspects. The role of three African healers was emphasized. These were Esperança, also known by her Kimbundu name Cazolla ca Ganga, the epithet clearly indicating that she was a ritual specialist (*nganga*); António á Cambundo, “the principal sorcerer often sought” by Cunha; and a sorcerer named Bullo, Cunha’s “surgeon.”⁵⁵ António had been able to flee when soldiers had gone to arrest Cunha’s other associates, and by 1752, he was dead.⁵⁶

João Pereira da Cunha’s success was emphasized in some accounts, furthering suspicions that jealousy might have been a factor that turned public opinion in Ambaca against the *presidio*’s *capitão-mor*. Whereas former captain-majors had been able to send shipments of slaves and trade goods to Luanda every two months, Cunha had done so

⁵⁰ Proc. 9691, 75–77v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁵¹ Proc. 9691, 79–111v, 140, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁵² Heywood, “Portuguese into African,” 98–101.

⁵³ Proc. 9691, 80, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁵⁴ Proc. 9691, 83v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁵⁵ Proc. 9691, 84–94v, 104–108, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁵⁶ Proc. 9691, 104, 114v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

almost weekly, receiving both slave and ivory traders at his house almost daily.⁵⁷ This claim is not surprising. Cunha's reign as Ambaca's *capitão-mor* coincided with a period in Central African history during which slave exports from Luanda reached unprecedented heights.⁵⁸ Although in the original denunciations the benefits that Cunha garnered from the adoration of Central African spirits were mostly connected to his material well being, the witnesses now emphasized that these spirits were important in restoring him to health. Many witnesses claimed that they had seen how a *cortège* had one evening left Cunha's house when he had been seriously ill, and carried him to a secluded place from whence he had returned in full health. These testimonies were later crucial in bringing the case to a conclusion, because they were inconsistent. It was unclear with whom and when Cunha had exited, what the witnesses had actually been able to see, and whether the story was completely fabricated by slaves who had allegedly accompanied the *cortège*.

All the investigations were in a sense wasted because João Pereira da Cunha died in the secret jails of the Inquisition on March 17, 1751, of internal inflammation.⁵⁹ Before he died, he was questioned once, on November 26, 1750. According to the normal procedure, the first hearing concerned his wealth. Cunha's account reinforces the impression that slave trading had been his main business. He had representatives in Rio de Janeiro, Salvador and Lisbon who handled the practical arrangements for sending trade goods to Angola and selling slaves in Brazil. He also said that he had departed from Angola with some sixty slaves, men and women, children and adults. Some twenty slaves had died during the voyage, but he sold the majority of those he had left in Salvador to a variety of people, and brought ten slaves to Lisbon with him. He listed all his slaves by name, and included his concubines Catarina and Josefa in the list, although he then added that he had given a letter of freedom to those two many years ago. He said that the three male slaves and one of the women were his. Catarina and Josefa each owned three slaves.⁶⁰ All his wealth was of little use in Lisbon. He had already been severely ill in Angola, probably suffering from typical tropical diseases that were calamitous for most whites who lived in Africa during the era of the slave trade.⁶¹ The fact that he arrived in Lisbon during the winter probably did not help either, because the jails were cold. Cunha began to vomit

⁵⁷ Proc. 9691, 91v, 107, TSO/IL, ANTT. On the commercial activities of *capitães-mores*, see Couto, *Os capitães-mores*, 76–88; Miller, *Way of Death*, 264–68.

⁵⁸ José C. Curto, "A Quantitative Reassessment of the Legal Portuguese Slave Trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830," *African Economic History* 20 (1992), 1–25.

⁵⁹ Proc. 9691, 159, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁶⁰ Proc. 9691, 154–157v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁶¹ For descriptions of tropical diseases in Angola in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see F. Guerra, "Aleixo de Abreu [1568–1630], Author of the earliest book on Tropical Medicine describing Amoebiasis, Malaria, Typhoid Fever, Scurvy, Yellow Fever, Dracontiasis, Trichuriasis and Tungiasis in 1623," *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 71, 3 (1968), 55–69; José Pinto de Azeredo, *Ensaio sobre algumas enfermidades d'Angola* (1799; reprint, Luanda: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola, 1967).

foul-smelling blood. The doctors tried to bleed him, but this only made matters worse and he died shortly thereafter.⁶²

“I Only Believe in God our Lord, in His Law and in Holy Mary”: Catarina Juliana’s Proceedings

Since João Pereira da Cunha was the main suspect of these proceedings, the Inquisitors forgot about Catarina Juliana for a long time. Although she had been a prisoner since November 1750, she was not brought for questioning until July 5, 1756. Catarina did not know her exact age but in 1756 she related that she was over forty years old. Testimonies in Angola had described her as a woman of medium height, and her skin color as “not very dark.” She had vertical scarification marks on her temples.⁶³ As was customary, the first interrogation concerned her wealth and belongings. When she was jailed in 1750, her belongings included two gold necklaces, golden buckles for shoes, a golden *veronica* (a saint’s image engraved on a medal)⁶⁴ with Holy Mary in one string and the Holy Sacrament in another, a golden cross, earrings, a golden dove, and small copper jewels. She said that she also owned a silver necklace; two gold necklaces with a golden *breve da marca* (a rosary) attached to one and a relic of *Santo Lenho* (a holy piece of wood of Christ’s cross) to the other; three bracelets made of red coral; and her clothes. Besides these inanimate objects, Catarina owned three slaves. They had arrived in Lisbon with Catarina, but she did not know what had happened to them since. Catarina’s most valued possession was the *carta de Alforria*, or letter of manumission, that had been given to her by João Pereira da Cunha shortly after he had bought her. She disclosed that it was given to her because she had “an illicit relation and friendship” with him.⁶⁵

This list of belongings is valuable because there are few descriptions from eighteenth century Angola of how the Atlantic creole women dressed and what they valued. Catarina apparently had a varied collection of jewelry, from necklaces to earrings and bracelets made of gold or silver. Her jewels certainly helped her display wealth and status. It is not impossible to think that she or João Pereira da Cunha had bought some of these jewels in Bahia, where they called at and lived for about a month on their way from Luanda to Lisbon. Catarina specified that she had bought only the coral bracelets in Angola. She did not reveal when she had bought or received the other pieces of jewelry. One should also note that there were many Catholic objects among her possessions. She carried a cross, a *veronica*, a *breve da marca* and a relic of *Santo Lenho*, as well as a dove (a symbol of the Holy Spirit).

After she had been duly questioned about her belongings, Catarina was to disclose her genealogy in the next interrogation. Her parents had both been slaves and were already

⁶² Maria Antonieta Garcia, “Doentes nos cárceres da inquisição,” *Cadernos de Cultura*, 12—Special Issue: *Medicina na Beira Interior da Pré-História ao Século XX* (1998), 42.

⁶³ Proc. 9691, 84, 113v, TSO/IL, ANTT; Proc. 13836, 136, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁶⁴ Raphael Bluteau, *Vocabulário português & latino: aulico, anatomico, architectonico...* (Coimbra: Collegio das Artes da Companhia de Jesu, 1712–1728), VIII, 445–46.

⁶⁵ Proc. 6948, 4, TSO/IL, ANTT; Proc. 13836, 2–3v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

dead. Catarina's father had been a tailor, a slave of Father João Chamor, and her mother Juliana Salvador had been Josepha Florim Correa's slave. Both were born and had lived their whole life in Luanda. She did not know her paternal grandparents, but her maternal grandparents had been slaves of Josepha Florim Correa as well. She had a paternal aunt named Florencia Antonia, who was married to Manoel João, both slaves of Father João Chamor. Catarina also related that she had given birth to a child whose father was João Pereira da Cunha. They had named her Maria, but she had died at eight months. Catarina had been baptized in the Sé of Luanda, the Igreja da Nossa Senhora da Conceição.⁶⁶ Her godparents had been Joseph, a free black, and Barbara Rodrigues, a freed black. She had been confirmed in the Igreja da Nossa Senhora do Rosario. At confirmation, her godmother had been Felipa de Pina, a *parda* woman. Catarina said that, after coming of age, she had gone to church, heard mass and sermon, confessed and participated in the communion, and done other Catholic deeds. The Inquisitors commanded her to recite on her knees the doctrines of the Church, which she did by reciting Our Father, Ave Maria, the credo, and the Ten Commandments.⁶⁷

There is no doubt that Catarina met the basic conditions of a good Catholic. She knew inwardly the tenets of the faith and had lived her whole life under the influence of Portuguese culture, first in the household of Josepha Florim Correa and *Sargento-mor* Cypriano da Silva Rocha, a Luso-African woman and a Portuguese soldier, and then as João Pereira da Cunha's concubine. She spoke fluent Portuguese and was well prepared to defend herself and her former lover in front of the Inquisition. The Inquisitors, however, were not convinced of Catarina's outward displays of humility. They had learned that the Devil tempted even good Christians in many ways, and that formulaic prayers and the creed were easily memorized by the most hardened atheists. Catarina was left in jail for another year before the proceedings were continued in July 1757. In her first real interrogation, she was pressed especially about her relation to the Devil. Had the Devil appeared to her at some point and under what guise? Had she made a pact with the Devil, in what words and what had she promised? Had she communicated with the Devil or called Him? To these and other similar questions, Catarina answered firmly no. She also said that she understood that such things were against God's law and will and that worshipping the Devil led to eternal damnation. Catarina maintained throughout that she only believed in God our Lord, in his Law and in Holy Mary.⁶⁸

In the next interrogation Catarina was finally questioned about what had happened in Ambaca some ten years earlier. Her interrogators finally showed what they had learned from the denunciations, and the details of the accusations were revealed to Catarina for the first time. There is little need to repeat the contents of this interrogation, since the main line of accusations has already been presented. In their questions, the Inquisitors concentrated on the adoration of idols Gangazumba, Kibuku, and Muta Calombo. They

⁶⁶ On baptism of elite slaves like Catarina in Luanda, see José C. Curto, "As If From A Free Womb': Baptismal Manumissions in the Conceição Parish, Luanda, 1778-1807," *Portuguese Studies Review* 10, 1 (2002), 26-57.

⁶⁷ Proc. 13836, 5v-6v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁶⁸ Proc. 13836, 9-13v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

asked where Catarina had been when feasts had been organized for these idols, and whether she had participated in *mbulungo* rituals and in the adoration of a bearded goat. Catarina categorically denied everything that she was accused of, so she was thrown back in jail.⁶⁹

There was then a break in the proceedings until the beginning of October, when Catarina was again brought in front of the interrogators, who read out the charges and asked her to confess. She still answered that the accusations were all fabricated, that such things had never happened.⁷⁰ Catarina was then given a chance to prepare a defense together with a procurator, the licentiate José Mendes da Costa. They went to work and produced a letter containing many arguments in Catarina's favor. The letter started by stating that Catarina's parents were both Catholics, and they had brought her up to believe in the Catholic Faith. She explained how she confessed and participated in communion, not only during Easter, but also on other holy days as well as regularly on Sundays. All the accusations were fabricated by enemies of João Pereira da Cunha, according to the defense.

Catarina said that she had lived with João Pereira da Cunha in Ambaca for about six years. She claimed she did not even know the names of the idols that were mentioned in the accusations. However, she admitted that once, when João Pereira da Cunha had been seriously ill for several months, she had called the tailor Ventura Gonçalo, who proposed that Cunha should drink water to which *muloro* root had been added.⁷¹ Catarina mixed the herb in water and gave it to Cunha to drink. After trying this cure, Cunha recovered from his sickness. But Catarina then went on to claim that before giving Cunha the drink, she had asked a priest to bless it. Finally, Catarina added that she had never seen a bearded goat in Angola.⁷²

Before being accepted as valid, Catarina's defense had to be verified by witnesses in Angola. A list of questions was sent from Lisbon on December 6, 1757, and began to be put to people in Luanda as of December 1758, but the results of the inquiry were not sent back to Lisbon until June 1761. The vicar Francisco Xavier Netto Magalhães, who was responsible for the proceedings in Angola, cited the difficulties involved in bringing witnesses from distant parts of the interior to Luanda for the interviews as a reason for the delay. Some of the witnesses he had wanted to question were either dead or their whereabouts were unknown. In his introduction, Magalhães reflected on the accusations that had been leveled against João Pereira da Cunha, and expressed his opinion that Cunha was innocent and a victim of a conspiracy. Magalhães had always known Cunha as a

⁶⁹ Proc. 13836, 15–20, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁷⁰ Proc. 13836, 21–24, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁷¹ *Muloro*, or *mulolo*, was listed by Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica*, I, 49, in his list of plants and herbs, as a plant "4 or 5 hands tall, [which] gives a fruit similar to cedar[...] healthy to the stomach and tasty in the mouth." According to Jose Pedro Sousa Dias, "Índice de drogas medicinais angolanas em documentos dos séculos XVI a XVIII," *Revista Portuguesa de Farmácia* 45, 4 (1995), 174–84, it was used to cure fevers.

⁷² Proc. 13836, 31–33v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

Catholic of “fervent devotion,” known for his participation in the festivities of Our Lady of Sorrows, held each year in Luanda.⁷³

Magalhães had been able to find fifteen people to answer questions about Catarina Juliana’s case. Interestingly, all but one had been born in either Ambaca or Luanda. They were Luso-Africans of various professions and ages. Among them was a black man, a *parda* woman, and two widows. Miguel Fernandes, the black man, (like João Teixeira, another black who had testified earlier against João Pereira da Cunha) had a Portuguese name. This reflects the naming practices that had become common among the Central Africans with the spread and adoption of Christianity. As Heywood and Thornton have shown, it was common for African converts to take Portuguese names, reflecting the interpenetration of Christian and African customs.⁷⁴

Maria Pimenta, the freed, sixty-year-old *parda* woman, had been Catarina Juliana’s close friend in Luanda. Most of the witnesses had known Catarina as a good Catholic, a God-fearing Christian, who did not commit idolatry. Maria Pimenta related that Catarina had been raised as a Catholic since infancy, being instructed in Christian doctrine by her godmother Barbara. Catarina was also devoted to Our Lady of the Rosary, and a member of the Rosary Brotherhood in Luanda, participating eagerly in the festivities that were held on the Feast day of Our Lady of the Rosary.⁷⁵ Catholic lay brotherhoods had arrived in Central Africa by 1610, for at that time there was a Rosary Brotherhood in Kongo’s capital São Salvador. By the late seventeenth century, there were several Rosary Brotherhoods in Angola. The Brotherhood in Luanda consisted of freed blacks and slaves, who were served by a chaplain.⁷⁶ Catarina’s participation in the brotherhood confirms that the Rosary Brotherhood was important to the blacks of Luanda and continued to be a focus of their devotion in the mid-eighteenth century. However, things seem to have gone awry in Ambaca. Most witnesses reported that something suspicious had been going on in João Pereira da Cunha’s household. Although no one accused her of witchcraft, it was implied that Catarina had at least given her consent to magic practices that had been carried out in their home. Although they had not seen her do so, many witnesses said that Catarina had adored the idols by calling *xinguiladores* to their home. It is interesting to note what terms the witnesses used. Miguel Fernandes did not mention the term *xinguila*. In his parlance, the specialists were *cirurgioens* (surgeons) or *curadores* (healers). They healed people with herbs and roots because those were the medicines that were used in Angola. Maria Pimenta explained that when João Pereira da Cunha was sick, he sent for *cirurgioens*, who were “blacks of the *sertãos*, *xinguiladores*, which is the same as idolaters.”⁷⁷

⁷³ Proc. 13836, 55, 87–87v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁷⁴ Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, 208–10.

⁷⁵ Proc. 13836, 60, 79v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁷⁶ Lucilene Reginaldo, “Os Rosários dos Angolas: irmandades negras, experiências escravas e identidades africanas na Bahia setecentista,” (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2005), 34–36.

⁷⁷ Proc. 13836, 58v, 60–60v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

“I Only Gave Them My Exterior Adoration”: Catarina’s Confession and the Final Ruling

Due to the slow pace of communications between Lisbon and Luanda, all these clarifications arrived too late. In the shadows of her cell, Catarina had decided to give up and confess. This took place on July 24, 1758, two years after her case had begun and more than seven years after arriving in Lisbon as a prisoner. After being given instructions on how to make a formal confession, Catarina began to tell her story. The events she described had happened about thirteen to fourteen years ago, i.e., in the mid-1740s in Ambaca. Catarina related that she had been sick and suffered from swelling. She had gone to visit a freed black named Matheus Capichi, a baptized man who lived in a place called Guiságo. Matheus told Catarina that he knew a person who could heal her. Catarina consented to meeting her, but wanted to do so in such a way that João Pereira da Cunha would not know. She went one night to the house of Esperança, a free unbaptized black woman⁷⁸ who lived in Anatunga, a league and a half from Ambaca. Catarina was carried in a litter by the slaves Matheus and João, and was accompanied by a girl called Antonia. All these slaves were later sold in Bahia. Esperança told Catarina that she had Kibuku and Muta in her body. In order to heal Catarina, Esperança called other blacks to gather in her house. They began playing drums, clapping hands, and dancing. Catarina, seated on the ground, clapped along. Esperança called on the spirits Kibuku and Muta, and in Catarina’s words, did a dance named the *Calandúz*, which took about an hour. After dancing, Esperança killed a rooster, drained its blood into a bowl and mixed some herbal powders in it. Esperança then applied the potion on Catarina’s body, but she did not experience any improvement in her condition.

The treatment nevertheless continued, after Catarina had given seven *varas*⁷⁹ of linen cloth as a payment. Esperança made four visits to Catarina’s home in order to complete the treatment, and she brought the herbal powders with her, which were mixed with castor oil and again applied onto Catarina’s body. Catarina slowly began to get better. Esperança asked Catarina to make further payments to her spirits, which she did, sending her bottles of *aguardente*⁸⁰ and pieces of pork meat, knowing full well that these would be offered to the idols in the pagan way. Catarina was certain that she had assisted in idolatry, clapping her hands and adoring the spirits that entered Esperança’s head, as the people believed. But Catarina denied that she really believed that the spirits entered Esperança’s

⁷⁸ Even if not a Christian, Esperança was known to Catarina by her Portuguese name, and not Cazolla ca Ganga, which was her Mbundu name. This indicates the prestige that people gave to Portuguese names. See Heywood and Thornton, *Central Africans*, 210. Naming patterns are also discussed in John Thornton, “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50, 4 (1993), 727–42; José C. Curto, “Resistência à escravidão na África: O caso dos escravos fugitivos recapturados em Angola, 1846–1876,” *Afro-Ásia* 33 (2005), 76–77.

⁷⁹ *Vara* was a measuring stick, used primarily to measure cloth of all kinds. According to *Dicionário de Língua Portuguesa* (Porto: Porto Editora, 1981), 1464, one *vara* equals 1.1 meters, so Catarina’s payment was 7.7 meters of cloth.

⁸⁰ Portuguese brandy distilled from the must of grapes.

head, and said that she gave only exterior adoration to the spirits, in order to regain her health.⁸¹

What Catarina was describing were common ways of conceptualizing health and healing in eighteenth-century Central Africa. Divination ceremonies that involved human possession were common in Angola. It is noteworthy that Catarina used the term *calandú* to describe the possession ritual. The Kimbundu term *kilundu* was a generic name for any spirit that possessed the living, but in colonial Brazil, the term that was commonly used to describe spirit possession was *calundú*.⁸² It is hard to tell whether the term *calandú* in Catarina's confession reflects Brazilian influences on Angola. She could have picked the term up at some point during her travels from Luanda to Lisbon, or *calandú* could have entered into use in Angola even before Catarina departed her homeland. In an early eighteenth-century document that described religious life in Angola, however, the term *kilundu* was still used to describe human possession.⁸³ The *calandú* ceremonies, whether in Central Africa or Brazil, were led by ritual specialists (*xinguilas*, *ngangas*), and often shared certain characteristics. Catarina's description of such a ritual was no different. First, musical instruments, hand clapping, and singing helped the *xinguila* enter a trance. When the invoked spirits entered the *xinguila*, she began to speak with a strange voice, divined the cause of an illness, and defined the cure. To appease discontented spirits, a sacrifice was demanded from the sick person and an herbal cure was offered as a remedy for the sickness.⁸⁴

Why would a Christian resort to the services of African healers and spirit mediums that were in stark contrast with Catholic doctrines? Catarina's confession raises this and other questions about her religious identity. In Catarina's case, her Christian identity was emphasized by her participation in sacraments and in brotherhood activities in Luanda. In fact, she had been raised as a Christian since infancy. 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. They did not consider these different traditions to be conflicting. Although Catarina claimed otherwise, she would not have relied on Esperança unless she had believed in the efficacy of the cures Esperança offered.

João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana were not alone in believing that the most guaranteed cures were obtained from local healers. This belief was noted by the Brazilian-born Doctor José Pinto de Azeredo, who served as the *físico-mor* or head physician in Luanda in the 1790s. Azeredo wrote that despite the fact that blacks lived with the whites and learned their costumes, observed their religion, and spoke their language, they never forgot their rituals and "pagan superstitions." The blacks did not rely on Portuguese doctors and their medicine, but believed in local medicine called *milongo*

⁸¹ Proc. 13836, 43v–44v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁸² Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 144.

⁸³ "Ritos gentílicos, e superstições" 372–73.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Sweet, *Recreating Africa*, 144–52.

administered by African healers. Azeredo also lamented that many whites—those born in Angola as well as in Portugal—believed in the virtues of local remedies and specialists.⁸⁵

In her confession, Catarina still refused to place any blame on her former lover, João Pereira da Cunha. She emphasized that she had acted in secret without his consent. She wanted to remain loyal to him to the end. But did she succeed in drawing suspicions away from Cunha? Despite Catarina's confession, the case was again stalled because the prosecutors still wanted to question all the witnesses in Angola, who had already testified against João Pereira da Cunha, once again. The questions to the witnesses had been sent to Angola prior to Catarina's confession, but the slow pace of communications between Lisbon and Luanda, and between Luanda and Ambaca, resulted in it taking some four years before the case could proceed in Lisbon.

The final hearings of witnesses were held in Luanda between February and June 1761. Nine people were questioned but there were no new revelations, except for the fact that some witnesses seemed to have "forgotten" exactly what had happened in Ambaca.⁸⁶ It was finally confirmed that none of the witnesses had actually seen what had happened in João Pereira da Cunha's household or that he had perpetrated idolatry. Testimonies concerning the adoration of idols were based on gossip rather than fact. The witness Manoel dos Santos now said that it was not Cunha but his slaves who had adored the idols. João Amado da Silva adjusted his testimony and said that large drums, *emgomas*, had not been played in Cunha's house, but that smaller and quieter shakers called *isanguas* had. It thus became clearer that large-scale ceremonies had never been arranged in the house. However, many remembered seeing a variety of healers enter his house, either to attend to his slaves or to Cunha himself. According to Manoel dos Santos, the African healers had cured the *capitão-mor* of a *zumbi*, which he explained as a "lost soul." One recalls that a *zumbi* was also cited as the cause of the illness of Captain Antonio de Freitas in Benguela in the 1720s.

João Pinto da Silva validated the information that Catarina had given in her confession about giving *aguardente* as a payment to Esperança for her services as a *xinguila*. He also gave a description of the spirit possession ritual, which was very similar to what Cavazzi had written almost a hundred years earlier:

Xinguilar is to make a gathering in which they play instruments called *emgomas* 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.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Azeredo, *Ensaio*, 53.

⁸⁶ Proc. 13836, 117v–146v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁸⁷ Proc. 13836, 126v, TSO/IL, ANTT. See Cavazzi, *Descrição Histórica*, I, 204–205.

Concluding the sessions in Luanda, José de Matos Moreira, the incumbent *commissario* of the Inquisition in Angola, wrote his opinion of the whole case. Moreira had arrived in Luanda in 1729 and knew the European and Luso-African community in the city intimately, so he was well qualified to offer an opinion on the case. At the time of Moreira's arrival in Luanda, Cunha was just about to be promoted to the post of *capitão da infantaria* or captain of the infantry—a promotion that caused “major hatred” among his competitors. Cunha's major enemies, according to Moreira, were Antonio da Silva Correa Rocha, Francisco Mattozo de Andrade and his two sons Manoel and Pedro, as well as Antonio da Fonseca Coutinho, all soldiers. A complaint about Cunha had been filed in the 1730s and sent to Lisbon, alleging that being a captain of the infantry, he had traded illegally and sold guns and powder to the blacks of the *sertão*. However, Cunha had been cleared of these accusations, and had then proceeded to file a complaint against the man who had accused him. Moreira narrated that Cunha had made a trip to Brazil, and returned to Angola, having been nominated the *capitão-mor* of Ambaca. Up until this nomination, Moreira had never heard anyone alleging that Cunha was an idolater, or superstitious; rather, he was seen as astute, taciturn, and vengeful. Leaving for Ambaca, Cunha also sent a shipment of trade goods there, which he had got on credit from Manoel de Crasto. Soon he ordered another similar shipment from Crasto, who gave it to him on good terms, asking only a six percent commission. His enemies did not like such dealings.

Moreira deemed the first denunciation, in which Gabriel Neto Nogueira and Manoel Correa Leitão had testified, a complete hoax solely motivated by the fact that Cunha had refused them porters when they had tried to passage trade goods to Kasanje. This had already been suspected at the time, but when the second batch of denunciations collected in Ambaca by João Velho de Barros had arrived in Luanda, these had been sent to Lisbon because Manoel Mattozo de Andrade had convinced the governor that Cunha was a dangerous witch. Moreira set out a damning opinion of the two priests who had served in Ambaca at the time of the Cunha administration: Father Gonçalo de Gouvea Leite, a *pardo*, was known for his complete ignorance of Latin and his nonexistent talent, and Father João Velho de Barros, a white, was no more capable of being a priest. João Pereira da Cunha, on the contrary, had already studied in Portugal, and had continued studying with the Jesuits in Luanda when he had first arrived in the city. He was aware of the crass ignorance of these priests and treated them with little or no respect. This did not make him any less devout a Catholic. Even while in Ambaca, he continued to donate to the annual festivals that were held in Luanda to celebrate Our Lady of Sorrows, and this was not a small donation either. Although Moreira was aware that Cunha was not an easy figure to get along with, he seriously doubted that Cunha would ever have consented to idolatry. The *commissario* further suspected the reliability of the witnesses, and saw them as lying and cheating men, who in a conversation said one thing, but when giving a deposition said another.

Catarina Juliana, however, was a different figure. Moreira was not so sure about Catarina's lifestory, but he suspected that she was the slave whom Cunha had acquired from Cypriano da Silva and his wife Dona Josepha Florim. Moreira claimed that the lady of the house had sent for blacks from outside Luanda to “bless” their house without her husband's consent. If Catarina had grown up in that household, she surely was exposed to

idolatrous practices. In his statement, Moreira gave an indicting report on the creolized nature of Angolan society. He wrote that all the blacks were 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 thirty-two years of residence in Luanda and his fifteen years as the prosecutor of the ecclesiastical court had given him ample evidence of these practices.⁸⁸

While the proceedings dragged on, Catarina's plight was somewhat eased. Instead of having to languish in a cell, she was put to work in the jail kitchen. This was not what she had hoped for after her confession, but it was better than isolation and inactivity. It was there that she died on October 21, 1763. She had already suffered from stupor, and recovered from it only partially. After that, she had been a bed patient for thirteen months. Before her death, she had confessed and participated in Eucharist several times and had been given the last rites. She was given a Church burial in the Igreja de Santa Justa. Catarina died as a Catholic. The women who had worked with her in the jail kitchen testified how Catarina had shown contrition and called for Holy Mary and other saints that she was devoted to.⁸⁹

Catarina Juliana's case does not include a sentence. However, after Catarina's death, a verdict was finally reached in João Pereira da Cunha's case. The ruling, although posthumous, was reached in May 1764 and was in Cunha's favor. The verdict stated that the charges had not been proved by the testimonies. There were simply too many inconsistencies and too many witnesses whose statements were solely based on gossip. The Inquisitors judged that some of the witnesses had been motivated by ill will to testify against Cunha. The witnesses had also made assumptions they could not prove.⁹⁰ João Pereira da Cunha's good reputation in Luanda and the fact that many people had testified to how generously he had participated in the activities of Santa Casa de Misericórdia, were sufficient proof of his adherence to Catholic Faith and morality. Also the fact that no one had been able to find any circumstantial evidence against Cunha—no idols were found among his confiscated property—must have weighed in the trial's conclusion. Neither must one forget Catarina's loyalty. Throughout the proceedings, she refused to place any blame on Cunha, and took responsibility completely herself.

The verdict was read in the *auto de fé*, or public ceremony of condemning the heretics, on October 27, 1765. It stated that João Pereira da Cunha's bones could now be given an ecclesiastic burial. His confiscated wealth was to be distributed among his inheritors after the expenses of the Inquisition were paid. But was the verdict correct and just? There was probably some truth in the accusations, and I believe that Catarina Juliana did not operate in secret from João Pereira da Cunha. Catarina confessed to seeking help from African healers for her illness, but it is highly probable that healers were also administering remedies to Cunha. This is not surprising. Thirty years of experience must

⁸⁸ Proc. 13836, 147–154, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁸⁹ Proc. 13836, 158, 171, 173v, TSO/IL, ANTT.

⁹⁰ Proc. 9691, 168–171, TSO/IL, ANTT.

have shown Cunha that local medicine in Central Africa was effective. In Ambaca, there were no other choices if an individual wanted to be healed from sickness. But I doubt that Cunha took part in any adoration rituals as was alleged, although he must have collaborated with many Africans who did. As far as justness is concerned, malice and envy seem to have been the greatest motives for those who denounced Cunha. Through his lucrative involvement in the slave trade, Cunha had made many enemies who simply wanted to get rid of him. A story was fabricated, rumors were spread, and the suspect was effectively removed from the scene.

The fact that Cunha took his concubine Catarina to Ambaca with him was crucial to the case. After arriving in Angola, Cunha had not married a Luso-African woman, as did many of his colleagues in the military establishment. Because of his choice of a partner, Cunha lacked the necessary connections with the local elite in Luanda that would perhaps have protected him from any accusations in the first place. It is hard to say what the real motives behind Cunha's choice were. Catarina's presence in Ambaca probably facilitated Cunha's relations with the local *sobas*, but her presence also made it easier for Cunha's enemies to fabricate the accusations against them. In the initial denunciations, Catarina was depicted as a malignant witch and idolater, which probably made the Inquisitors react more rigorously to the accusations.

Conclusion

The case of João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana provides insights on over two centuries of creolization in Central Africa. The detailed proceedings describe patterns of cultural and religious life that were common and popular in Angola in the eighteenth century. People were not normally punished for this type of behavior and did not get into trouble with the Inquisition unless they occupied an important position in the social hierarchy. In João Pereira da Cunha's case, many people clearly had economic reasons to force him out of the slave trade in Ambaca. But as *commissario* Moreira wrote to the Inquisitors, religious life in Angola was characterized by syncretic practices. The Portuguese administrators and priests roundly condemned these practices in the eighteenth century. For blacks and Luso-Africans of Angola, however, syncretism in religious practice was part of their everyday life.

The stories of João Pereira da Cunha and Catarina Juliana show, at the individual's level, how creolization had come to characterize eighteenth-century Angola. Catholic religion brought by the Europeans played a prominent role in the daily life of the population, most strongly in Luanda and to a lesser degree in the interior. New elements were introduced into African religious life, but this did not necessarily imply that ancestral traditions would have been forgotten. In Luanda, Ambaca, and throughout Central Africa, many people, although baptized and nominally Christian, continued to adore their ancestral and territorial spirits. Central African religious life was inclusive and remained open to new ideas and influences but never abandoned the old traditions. João Pereira da Cunha's and Catarina Juliana's life both bear testimony to this spirit of religious and cultural tolerance—a tolerance that in their case proved to be fateful.