

# Creole Societies in the Portuguese Colonial Empire



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Edited by

Philip J. Havik and Malyn Newitt

Cambridge  
Scholars  
Publishing



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This book first published 2015

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-8027-2

ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-8027-5

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## FOREWORD

The papers in this volume were delivered at the Charles Boxer Memorial Conference held at King's College London in 2004. This conference celebrated the centenary of the birth of the man who, for most of the twentieth century, was the leading historian of the Portuguese colonial empire. The papers were subsequently published in July 2007 by the Bristol University's Department of Hispanic, Portuguese and Latin American Studies as Volume 6 in its Lusophone Studies series. This series has now been discontinued and Volume 6 is long out of print and virtually unobtainable.

The editors believe that, although scholarship in this field has in some respects moved on, many of the papers in this collection are of such exceptional and lasting importance that the scholarly public needs to have continued access to them. This is particularly important as two of the contributors, John Russell-Wood and Glenn Ames, have died since the collection was first published and the academic world no longer has the benefit of their scholarship.

Although the biographical details of the contributors have been updated, the texts of the papers are here reproduced as first published in 2007.

# INTRODUCTION

PHILIP J. HAVIK AND MALYN NEWITT

## **The Boxer Memorial Conference**

Charles Boxer, the most distinguished scholar of Portuguese colonial history of the twentieth century, died in 2000 aged 96. Boxer was widely known in the academic world for his lucid and entertaining narratives, for his scholarly translations from Dutch and the Portuguese, for his masterly text-books and for the wide ranging essays, some of them collected into thematic volumes, which helped to shape the whole post-war understanding of European overseas expansion. Boxer was also a great bibliophile and possessed one of the greatest private libraries of his day, eventually selling his massive collection of rare books and manuscripts to the Lilly Library in Indiana. Quite apart from his prodigious academic achievement, Boxer's life was colourful and eventful enough to have attracted the attention of biographers. As a young man he learnt to speak Japanese, was deeply knowledgeable about Japanese culture and knew many leading figures in the Japanese military. He travelled widely throughout eastern Asia and Indonesia and acquired such a detailed knowledge of Far Eastern history that he was offered the chair of Far Eastern History at the School of Oriental and African Studies. He was an intelligence officer in Hong Kong in the early days of the Second World War and was wounded in the Japanese capture of the city in 1941, after which he spent three years interned as a prisoner of war, some of it in solitary confinement and under sentence of death.

In 1945, after a love affair which acquired some notoriety, he married Emily Hahn, an American journalist and writer who chronicled the first ten years of their relationship in two volumes of highly entertaining autobiography, in the second of which Boxer features as the "Major" in scenes of post-war Britain that could have come from E.M. Delafield's *Provincial Lady*.

None of this, however, adequately describes a man who was able to combine the traditional manners of the English landed gentry with a sceptical outlook on politics, and a deeply cynical view of the British

Empire, whose demise in the Far East he had witnessed at first hand. Famously Boxer twice refused to be decorated by the Queen, first because other more deserving men had been overlooked because of their colour and on the second occasion because, as he famously stated, there was no longer an Empire of which to be a Member.

Between 1947 and 1967 Boxer held the Camoens Chair of Portuguese at King's College London, although he had never attended University himself and held no degree, apart from the six honorary doctorates that he received from different institutions. In 1997 King's College gave his name to an established chair in Portuguese History and in 2004 the Department of Portuguese and Brazilian Studies at King's College organized a Conference to commemorate the centenary of his birth. The theme of the Conference was *Creole Societies in the Portuguese Colonial Empire*. Boxer had published four volumes of essays on Iberian colonial society in the early modern period and the organizers felt that a fitting memorial would be a Conference which would focus on an aspect of Portuguese society overseas that was the subject of current academic debate. The chosen theme was, without doubt, one on which, had he been alive, Charles Boxer would have had a great deal to say. By attending the conference, his daughters, Amanda and Carola, gave the commemorative event a special character, while providing welcome insights into their father's life and work. It was felt appropriate to invite contributions not only from the leading figures in the field, some of them Boxer's former students and associates, but also from younger researchers who would form the next generation scholars.

The Conference focused on the societies that came into being outside Europe as a result of Portuguese overseas expansion. The intention was to move away from the style of historical writing which sees the history of European expansion as a series of stark confrontations between imperialist Europeans and exploited indigenous populations—a type of discourse that had prevailed since the struggle for colonial independence. Instead a major theme running through the contributions to the Conference was the ability of Creole groups to negotiate their own identities and to some extent their access to resources and even to power. The “white” colonial elites seldom dominated society at all levels and their rule always depended on accommodating the interests of numerous indigenous and Creole interest groups. As Philip Havik expresses it,

“the assimilation of Portuguese authorities into, and their dependence on, local societies should be studied, rather than only the opposite, as should the role women played as brokers in these communities.”

## The Portuguese Diasporas

Portuguese overseas expansion was not only, or even mainly, an enterprise directed by the political and military elite of Portugal. Rather it was driven forward by three distinct but connected population diasporas. Between 1400 and 1974 millions of Portuguese left their homeland to settle in territories ruled by Portugal in the Atlantic Islands, Brazil, Africa and Asia. Millions more dispersed to other European countries and their colonies and to the New World. The cause of this continuous haemorrhage of population was domestic poverty and the primitive state of the economy—the inability of Portugal to support its population either on the land or in the towns. In addition, natural disasters such as the 1531 earthquake, epidemics such as the plague which ravaged Portugal between 1569 and 1602, as well as the loss of independence, wars and famines all contributed to the exodus from the mainland. In turn, the Atlantic Islands generated their own diasporas and the flows of emigrants from Madeira, the Azores and Cape Verde Islands met and mingled with the flow of migrants still coming from Portugal itself.

The second diaspora was, to a large extent, generated by the first. The Portuguese initiated, and for two hundred years almost monopolized, the seaborne slave trade from Africa. However, the vast export of slaves as labour to New World plantations has often resulted in other aspects of this diaspora being ignored. As well as sending Africans to the Americas to be unskilled labourers, the Portuguese sold slaves from one part of Africa to other Africans, they brought large numbers of slaves to Europe and they exported African slaves to different parts of Asia. Slaves were employed as household servants and retainers, as interpreters, as soldiers and sailors in the Portuguese armies and fleets and as skilled artisans and craftsmen. Slave women, for their part, made up for the shortage of European women among the emigrants from Europe. Without the slave mothers the Cape Verde and Guinea Islands would never have been peopled nor would the settlement of the colonies in East and West Africa and in Brazil have been possible. By the early seventeenth century there were about 120,000 African (and native Indian) slaves in Brazil alone, whilst the number of its free inhabitants had increased to fifty thousand, making it Portugal's largest overseas colony.

Although virtually all Africans left the shores of Africa as captives, free populations of African descent rapidly appeared in the areas of settlement. In Cape Verde and São Tomé the children and grandchildren of the original colonists and their slave wives formed a community of free black Portuguese, who in São Tomé significantly adopted the name *forros*

(freemen) to describe themselves. In the sixteenth century São Tomé was raised to the status of a City and a Bishopric and by the seventeenth century the councillors of the *Senado da Câmara* and the canons of the cathedral were free black men of African origin. Free black “Portuguese” populations also grew up in Angola, Mozambique and Brazil. Colonial society, therefore, was never simply a matter of white masters and black slaves but from the start was composed of elements, which were differentiated by class, place of origin, religion and cultural affinity.

The third diaspora, which coincided chronologically with the other two, was the dispersal of the Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula. The expulsion of the Jews fell within the same decade in which Columbus reached America and Vasco da Gama made his famous voyage to India. In Portugal this dispersal was not a single traumatic expulsion but continued for centuries as the New Christians (Jews who had thought to remain in Portugal by outwardly conforming to Christianity) were periodically persecuted and forced into new waves of emigration. Although many, probably most, Sephardic Jews went to North Africa, to France or to the Netherlands, others took passage to West Africa, the islands, Brazil and even India, seeking to keep one step ahead of the tentacles of the Inquisition. The importance of the Sephardic Jews in Portuguese expansion can be felt at various levels—from the networks of Jewish bankers who financed Spanish and Portuguese trade and military activity in the seventeenth century, to the investors who established the sugar plantations in Northern Brazil and the religious refugees who celebrated Passover in the trading towns of West Africa.

New Christians had to obtain royal permission to leave Portugal and their settlement in West Africa, where many of them secretly went, was prohibited. Tobias Green’s examination of the records of the Inquisition “suggests that West Africa was not only a hotbed of crypto-Jewry, but a place where Catholics were actively converted to the Mosaic faith.” In 1551 the jurisdiction of the Lisbon Inquisition was extended to cover the Atlantic territories but it took little action, largely for financial reasons, for, as Green puts it,

“almost two thirds of the debts of the Inquisition were due to the overseas expeditions to Brazil and the Atlantic islands [...] purity of the faith was essential and non-negotiable, but it could not be allowed to transcend the purity of the balanced account ledger,”

a sentiment echoed more succinctly by Boxer who wrote of the *lançados* (as quoted by Philip Havik), “Lisbon was more concerned with tax evasion than with their going native.” In fact, this freedom of religion in the West

African coastal towns was, Tobias Green suggests in a cleverly turned argument, obliquely encouraged as part of the ideological underpinning of the slave trade.

“Both the absence of severe inquisitorial tribunals in Africa, and their presence in the Americas, were fundamental to the perceived legitimisation of the entire process of the slave trade. Their absence in Africa confirmed the assumption that Africans were non-humans, among whom religious or cultural orthodoxy need not be a requirement; their presence in the Americas confirmed the fact that the Africans had been ‘saved’ by the process of their enslavement.”

### **The Elusive Nature of Identity**

Although these colonial societies can be studied through the formal structures and legal definitions of church and state, postmodern criticism has made historians aware of the difficulty of trying to establish an objective historical reality. Perceptions of colonial society would inevitably differ when viewed from the point of view of different social groups. Moreover, over time, social relations and issues of identity in the colonial society moved like patterns in a kaleidoscope. As A.J.R. Russell-Wood repeatedly emphasizes, nothing is more revealing than the complex of names that Portuguese writers used to try to capture these shifting identities, names which might be enshrined in legal pronouncements but which never succeeded in covering the nuances and complexities which people themselves recognised and understood. Or, as Rosa Williams warns, writing of the racial composition of early colonial Angola

“rather than engaging with the ways in which racial frameworks are produced and maintained, historians of Lusophone Africa have tended to collapse the heterogeneous populations that they encounter into two or three categories of identity which rarely reflect the ways in which people identified themselves and one another.”

The term “creole” is used throughout this volume. It is a term which exists in most European languages but which is used with widely different meanings. Creole is sometimes used to describe people of European parentage or descent born in the colonies—a white colonial population; it is also used for colonial populations where there is a mixture of European or non-European descent; however, the word also applies to people of African descent born in the Americas. In some cases such as the Cape Verde islands or São Tomé and Príncipe, certain miscegenated groups

defined themselves as Creole having developed their own languages. In other areas such as Guinea, a Creole language emerged as a *lingua franca* among Africans of different “ethnic” origins living in coastal towns who called themselves “Christians”. Then again, in Angola, Mozambique and Brazil “creolised” groups did not produce a Creole language or dialect, but did leave a distinctive cultural heritage. The term is thus used adjectivally for languages or other cultural traits, which are perceived to mix European with non-European elements. The term is employed by the writers in this volume in a broad, inclusive sense to refer to all populations or cultures, which came into existence outside Europe as a result of European contacts with the peoples of Africa, Asia or the Americas.

Contemplating the indigenous populations of their empires seldom created problems for Europeans. Indigenous peoples were, almost by definition, “the other”. They represented either savage primitiveness or civilized decadence, in either case to be described, defined, disciplined, controlled and ruled—for their own benefit. People of European origin who settled, or were born, outside Europe were more difficult to classify. In racial terms they were white Europeans but culturally they invariably reflected the environment in which they lived. Rosa Williams quotes A. F. Nogueira who suggests that

“while Africans lag behind in their historical development, they are as yet untainted by the degeneracy that haunts Europeans. Africans at home in Africa are in little danger; Europeans in the tropics are vulnerable.”

Whereas some writers, like James Anthony Froude, could see in the colonial settler a person who recreated, in a truer and more robust fashion, the virtues being lost in the mother country, most people in the metropole saw in the rough-hewn, uncultured colonist someone who poorly represented the civilization of the mother country and who could not be trusted with self-government or the responsibility for his own affairs. In *Ebb-Tide* (first published in 1894) R.L. Stevenson described a typical white man in the tropics.<sup>1</sup>

“Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease. Some prosper, some vegetate. Some have mounted the steps of thrones and owned islands and navies. Others again must marry for a livelihood; a strapping, merry, chocolate-coloured dame supports them in sheer idleness; and, dressed like natives, but still retaining some foreign element of gait or attitude, still perhaps with some relic (such as a single eye-glass) of the officer and gentleman, they sprawl in palm-leaf verandahs and entertain an island audience with memoirs of the music-hall.

And there are still others, less pliable, less capable, less fortunate, perhaps less base, who continue, even in these isles of plenty, to lack bread.”

In the Portuguese empire there was always a deep divide between the *reinol*, the Portuguese from Portugal, and the Portuguese born in the tropics. As Glenn Ames writes,

“the man born in the tropics was corrupted by his environment, was liable to loose morality, to heresy and above all could not be relied upon to uphold the hierarchies and value systems which sustained the ruling elite at home.”

The struggle to control colonial identities, and in this way to control colonial institutions, was fought at many levels. Ames discusses the reluctance of the Portuguese viceroys in the East to allow local Portuguese *casados* to occupy important offices in the *Província do Norte* in India, a reluctance which gradually gave way to necessity as the *Estado da Índia* tried desperately to recover after peace had been made with the Dutch in 1663. Also writing about India, Teotónio de Souza reflects on the comparative failure of the Portuguese to implant their identity, their language and culture in the Goan territories, in spite of five hundred years of occupation and direct rule. He suggests that, in spite of the much-celebrated policy of intermarriage and the prevalence of irregular unions between Portuguese men and Indian women, the Hindu caste system was strong enough to prevent the emergence of a large Luso-Indian population. The so-called *descendentes*, the real Luso-Indian Creoles, became, in effect, little more than a very narrow caste of elite families, who would not mix with the lower caste Goans but who were distrusted and frequently side-lined by the Portuguese administration. As a result the Portuguese language failed to establish itself securely in Goa. The native Goans spoke Konkani or, if they sought a modern education, they found it through the medium of English in nearby British India. Without a secure base in the Portuguese language or a Portuguese-based Creole the “Portugueseness” of the Goans remained shallow and transient.

The populations which could be described neither as indigenous nor as being of pure European origin were much more difficult to classify and hence more difficult to know and to control. “Mixed” parentage raised legal, cultural and religious problems and, of course, problems of perception and identity.

For the Portuguese at the beginning of the era of expansion, the issue was further complicated by their ideological inheritance. In medieval Europe identity, beyond the immediate identification of birthplace,

residence and family, had depended on allegiance to a feudal lord, a sovereign and the Catholic Church. These were concepts which could be used by the Portuguese to assimilate and absorb anyone who would meet these criteria of acceptance. However, already by the end of the fifteenth century, notions of racial origin had begun to intrude. For a person of Jewish and Moorish descent it was no longer enough to be an orthodox catholic and to owe allegiance to the Crown, the mere fact of Jewish or Moorish ancestry cast doubt on these attributes. In the case of the “*mouriscos*”, that is those descended from the original “*mouros*”, their position was further complicated by their convert status, which caused them to be looked upon with suspicion, to the extent that they were called “Moorish New Christians”. In the case of the Jewish population itself, similar tropes defined their ambiguous position, some produced by the Sephardi community itself, for being a Jew was held to be something inherited from a Jewish mother. If Jews recognized the Jewishness of New Christians by reason of descent, it was not surprising that Old Christians would do the same. The doubt cast on the loyalty and orthodoxy of New Christians attached itself also to converts from other faiths and ultimately to those descended from parents or grandparents who had not been Christian. It was this that erected the barriers to their full integration into early modern society, illustrated for example by the reluctance to allow such people into the priesthood.

Further complications beset attempts to identify people of “mixed” parentage by family or lineage. In West Africa the Portuguese met matrilineal peoples among whom children were considered to belong to the lineage of the mother. Yet the Iberians, coming from a patrilineal and patriarchal society, were predisposed to recognize all the children sired by a man as being part of his family.

## **The Black Portuguese**

It was one of the major themes of Boxer’s seminal work *Mary and Misogyny* that sexual relations between Portuguese men and slave women, or women from the lands where the Portuguese settled, not only created a new nation of non-white Portuguese but allowed the female partners of a frequently transient male population of administrators, soldiers and sailors to acquire a dominant role in colonial society and economy. This was particularly the case in the colonial Iberian societies of Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia, which, in Philip Havik’s phrase, “demonstrated the inexorable logic of the creolisation process.” And Havik shows that in eighteenth century São Tomé the ratio of women to men in the *forro*

population was ten to one. The enhanced position of women in Creole societies is a theme pursued by a number of authors in this book. Russell-Wood notes that, "in brotherhoods of Africans and Afro-Brazilians, to a markedly higher degree than was the case in their white counterparts, women were prominent numerically and had considerable influence", while Arne Bialuschewski comments that

"in Tamatave, women virtually ran the local economy. They set up comprehensive trading networks and controlled the export trade until the late nineteenth century."

The explanation for this must surely lie in the transience of males in the maritime world of the early European empires. Whereas women were often fixed in the locality and society of their birth, men came and went with the ships and died on campaign or from privation and disease, one way or another disappearing from the scene leaving women not only as heads of households and sole parents but frequently owners of considerable property.

This freedom of sexual relations between the Portuguese and the indigenous women of the societies where they settled continued to characterize the Luso-African ethnicity. Like any other African group, the Luso-Africans sought to increase their productive powers and their political and social influence through expanding their lineages. In classic African fashion this could be done by acquiring slaves and clients and by begetting large numbers of children. Describing António Bezerra, a leading nineteenth century Luso-African *Ambakista*, Beatriz Heintze writes, "Lunda seemed to be populated with his children and relatives, a rather advantageous result of his earlier travel and trading activities."

In all the areas colonized by the Portuguese, new populations grew up from these "mixed" unions whose identity was complex and diverse. The chapters by Philip Havik and Rosa Williams show how Portuguese attitudes to these Luso-Africans changed. Distrusted in the seventeenth century for their immorality and unorthodox religious beliefs, the Luso-Africans became, in the nineteenth century, the mainstay of Portugal's imperial presence in both West and East Africa, carrying the flag deep into the interior and providing the military muscle which enabled Portugal to counter the territorial claims of other European powers. The nineteenth century was the heyday of the power and prosperity of the Luso-African Creoles in West Africa. They now ceased to be persecuted for the dubious nature of their religious belief and were feted as heroes (or heroines) of the empire. As Havik puts it, the Creole women

“filled the power vacuum and pioneered the production of export crops on land accessed through their kin networks. Besides owning and running big trade houses, hundreds of slaves, land for cultivation, vessels and shipyards, they also acted as key power brokers by means of their kinship relations with surrounding communities.”

And

“the fact that some of the most influential residents were women did not appear to trouble the Portuguese in the least, as long as they were transformed into dedicated wives, mothers and patriots.”

Then, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Portuguese perceptions of their own history changed abruptly. Rosa Williams shows how the imperial narrative now had to be rewritten. A perception of the Portuguese as “not quite white” had to be remedied so that Portugal could fend off the greedy eyes cast on its colonies by the more “civilized” and “racially pure” Germans, British and French. This perception of the Portuguese is graphically illustrated by Joseph Conrad. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, dating from 1895, there is a description the “half-caste” De Souza family.<sup>2</sup>

“They were a numerous and unclean crowd, living in ruined bamboo houses, surrounded by neglected compounds, on the outskirts of Macassar. ... They were a half-caste lazy lot, and he saw them as they were—ragged, lean, unwashed, undersized men of various ages, shuffling about aimlessly in slippers; motionless old women who looked like monstrous bags of pink calico stuffed with shapeless lumps of fat, and deposited askew upon decaying rattan chairs in shady corners of dusty verandahs; young women, slim and yellow, big-eyed, long-haired, moving languidly amongst the dirt and rubbish of their dwellings as if every step they took was going to be their very last. He heard their shrill quarrellings, the squalling of their children, the grunting of their pigs; he smelt the odours of the heaps of garbage in their courtyards: and he was greatly disgusted. But he fed and clothed that shabby multitude; those degenerate descendants of Portuguese conquerors.”

Such descriptions, whether or not they corresponded to any reality, clearly show the extent of the “image problem” that the Portuguese faced and meant that the Creole elites, which had been the mainstay of Portuguese influence in Africa, now had to be rejected. As Rosa Williams puts it,

“secure racial superiority is disrupted by the silent, implicit threat of African women diluting Portuguese blood and the explicit threat of pollution from an African physical and cultural environment”,

while

“the related tropes of decadence, miscegenation and criminality describe and account for constantly thwarted progress, personified in the existing Portuguese-speaking populations in Angola.”

Such extreme racist ideas, elaborated *para os ingleses e os alemães ver*, caused an almost immediate reaction from the class most threatened—the Creole elite itself—which was expressed in the writings of the *filho da terra* journalists of Angola who wrote for *Voz de Angola Clamando no Deserto*. The conflict was thus begun which was only to end when the European Portuguese were finally expelled from Angola in 1975 by the old Creole families, politically organised as the MPLA.

The Luso-African Creole communities were not, of course, confined to the areas under Portuguese control. From the beginning of Portugal’s overseas expansion, there had been an unofficial or informal empire that had grown up alongside the territories formally subject to the Portuguese Crown. Individual Portuguese sought to evade the economic monopolies of the Crown and the *capitães donatários* by settling in areas outside their jurisdiction and that of the church. This pattern was repeated in the East where many of the “unofficial” Portuguese communities became larger and more prosperous than the official towns of the *Estado da Índia*. These Portuguese who settled ‘beyond the Pale’ married into the local communities. Their children belonged to the maternal lineages and they themselves would trade within the networks of the indigenous populations. However, they retained ties with their Portuguese culture even after many generations had removed any visible trace of their Portuguese ancestry.

The best-known example of a Portuguese Creole society emerging outside the area of Portuguese control is that of the *lançados*, or Afro-Portuguese, of West Africa. José Nafafe shows how far these men were prepared to go in seeking assimilation into the African societies where they lived, adopting religious practices, tattooing their bodies and assuming African styles of dress, or undress. However, he argues that it was the religious freedom of the West African kingdoms, which was the greatest attraction, particularly for those men with a New Christian background fleeing persecution in Portugal.

Philip Havik describes the Kriston (Christianised Africans) of Guinea as being dominated by powerful female figures who

“were related by kinship to dignitaries from surrounding ‘ethnic’ communities and as a result were in a position to act as cultural brokers who formed bridges between the different geographical and social spaces.”

Havik quotes the example of Crispina Peres from the town of Cacheu (situated in the north of modern Guinea-Bissau).

“Married to the wealthy and influential son of a ‘rebellious Jew’, she was the incarnation of the free African woman from the Afro-Atlantic towns acting as head of household, as the partner of an influential trader-official, and as a slave owner. However, she also represented the Christianised African with syncretic beliefs, indigenous healer and lynchpin of local support networks controlled by women from trade settlements.”

Such a case illustrates the role of both the Portuguese and the Jewish diasporas in the formation of the Creole communities of West Africa.

Beatrix Heintze explores in some detail the history of the Bezerras, a family of Ambakistas in nineteenth century Angola. By the nineteenth century the Ambakistas had become clearly identified as a distinct and separate ethnic group. Their ethnic identity may have been based on a narrative myth of a Portuguese ancestry but this had long since ceased to represent the realities of the origin of most of the Ambakistas. As Heintze explains,

“the tribute to Bezerra was generally paid in young slaves—the generally accepted currency. These boys and girls comprised his large family, were educated and grew up to be good settlers. Most of them later returned with him to Malanje where they established their own small village.”

Like the Afro-Portuguese of West Africa, the Ambakistas claimed to be culturally “Portuguese” but increased the size and power of their community in traditional African ways by incorporating slaves and clients into their lineages.

## **The Creation of New Ethnicities**

One of the constant themes in the study of Creole societies is the question of new ethnicities, just as the emergence of new languages is in the study of linguistic “Creoles”. Groups that were dismissed as degenerate “half-castes” a hundred years ago are now seen as forging new ethnic, even national, identities. Not all such new “identities” flourish and

survive. In the universe of cultural Darwinism some newly evolved forms thrive, others do not, but societies continue to throw out new potential ethnicities and new cultural and linguistic groupings some of which will emerge as recognised “nationalities” and “languages”. Gerhard Seibert looks at the history of the Angolares, the maroon community in São Tomé, which succeeded in creating a distinct and recognised ethnic identity marked in particular by its own language. For the Angolares, the struggle today is for the recognition of their true historic identity as descendants of escaped slaves in a world where historical origins can carry political significance. Arne Bialuschewski examines another case of the birth of a new ethnicity, the Betsimisaraka, who arose from the apparently inauspicious beginnings of the intermarriage of renegade European pirates with the women of northern Madagascar.

Luís Batalha takes the struggle for recognition of Creole identity into the realms of language. Many of the Creole societies that grew up as a result of the contact between people of Portuguese origin and the indigenous populations of Africa, America and Asia developed their own languages. The study of Creole languages reflects the ambivalence that was felt about the identity of those who spoke them. Initially *Crioulo* was treated as a simplified form of Portuguese “which was seen as much too complex a language to be spoken by ‘uncivilized’ and ‘uncultured’ peoples.” However, as Luís Batalha points out, the linguists “forgot that the Creole language was the language not only of Negro slaves but of everybody else, including the erstwhile white elite.” The designation of some forms of communication as “languages” and some as “creoles” has no scientific basis and reflects the attitudes of intellectual elites to the peoples who use the Creole speech. He argues strongly that the *Crioulo* of Cape Verde should be formally recognized as a language in its own right, just as the Portuguese language, which began as a Creole form of Latin, has been.

Russell-Wood’s chapter focuses on the black and mulatto Creoles of Brazil—that is Brazilians of African descent born in Brazil. From the perspective of the white governing class, the black Creole, even when a freeman, was scarcely to be distinguished from the slave from Africa.

“This circumstance of being born a slave or being of slave parentage and thus a base (Portuguese: *vil*) person, regardless of the passage of several generations and manumission since slavery, led Portuguese settlers, elected municipal officials, crown representatives, and even the king to overlook legal distinctions between slave and free, differences of pigmentation between mulattos and blacks, and place of birth, and to pass or enforce legislation or impose punishments applicable to all persons of African descent.”

But the purpose of the chapter is to unravel the complexities of identity which Creoles (slave and free) and the African-born recognized among themselves. The culture of the Brazilian-born Creoles incorporated many forms and ideas from their African origin—most notably in the area of religion which “was inalienable from African cosmology, rituals, cultures, kingship and lineages, and permeated into value systems and behaviours.” It has been customary for historians to see this working itself out in the various forms of religious syncretism. Russell-Wood again:

“Syncretism was one strategy by which African cultures and mores could be maintained, in which facets of African- and European-derived cultures were melded in such a delicate balance that Europeans did not view the African component—if they recognized it at all—as being offensive.”

However, the Brazilian Creole population also distinguished itself sharply from those of African birth, because in Brazil “skin colour and even the ‘accident of birth’, to use a contemporary expression for a person of slave parentage, were negotiable”. A person *de cor equívoca* or *escuro* could become *pardo* or even be “white to all appearances (*ao parecer branco*) and thus eligible to hold public office notwithstanding decrees to the contrary”. So,

“Afro-Brazilians took steps to lessen their being mistakenly identified as Africans. Afro-Brazilian slave women consciously dressed themselves, adopted hair styles, and wore jewellery not merely as indicators of status but also to distinguish themselves from African women.”

Brazilian Creoles recognized a range of social indicators, including, of course, manumission, but also place of birth, language and profession. Creoles were often skilled persons, held positions of responsibility on plantations or aspired to membership of brotherhoods and militias.

“Africans were not formally excluded by decree or statute, but such formal exclusion would have been redundant. The social reality was that they were far less likely than were creoles to have the requisite qualifications to make them eligible and, if they were eligible, they did not have access to the social network in the Afro-Brazilian community whose support and trust they would have needed to become full participants in guilds or militia companies.”

If there is one conclusion to be drawn from these chapters it is that Creole societies should not just be seen as marginal forms of the societies

indigenous to Africa, America or Asia nor as exhibiting some kind of bastard European culture. Creole lineages and communities, whether arising from slaves negotiating status for themselves in Brazil, or from the maroons of São Tomé, or from the offspring of unions between European traders and pirates and local women in Madagascar, all had the potential to grow into clearly distinct ethnicities like the Ambakistas or the Betsimisaraka. Others like the *descendentes* of Goa and the *Província do Norte* remained as tiny, exclusive groups condemned to impotence by the strictures of caste. Yet others, like the Cape Verdeans, transcended all the doubts originally cast on their origin and on the validity of the *Crioulo* tongue and developed into nations with their own independent state and distinctive language. If in the case of Brazil, which incorporates the largest creolised society in the lusophone world, a Creole language did not emerge, its multifaceted cultural heritage spread far beyond its frontiers.

In Boxer's view miscegenation was the general rule on both sides of the Atlantic: while climatic reasons, among others, impeded the evolution of large mulatto communities in continental Africa, the opposite was the case in Brazil. In his *Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire*, Boxer held that processes of creolisation in Africa differed in accordance with geographic location: whereas on the mainland Portuguese became Africanised, on the islands—as in the Americas—European cultural traits tended to dominate. Since Boxer published these lectures and those reproduced in *Mary and Misogyny*, research has covered new ground and uncovered novel aspects of cross-cultural change along the shores of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The current volume provides a sample of recent work on Africa, Asia and the Americas, which highlights the roles that creolized communities played in such a vast area over a period of four centuries. Its intention is to contribute to the continuing debate on the changing patterns of historical interaction and the formation of complex identities in the Lusophone world that Charles Boxer initiated more than half a century ago.

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<sup>1</sup> R.L. Stevenson, *The Ebb-tide*, Tusitala Edition, 4<sup>th</sup> impression, (Heinemann: London, 1929), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, (Collins Classics: London, 1955), pp.19–20.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE ROLE OF THE PORTUGUESE TRADING POSTS IN GUINEA AND ANGOLA IN THE “APOSTASY” OF CRYPTO-JEWS IN THE 17TH CENTURY

TOBY GREEN

The story of the Sephardic Jews is a sad and a well-worn one. In 1492, the *Reyes Católicos*, Fernando and Isabel, ordered all the Jews in Castile and Aragon to convert or depart from their kingdoms. Of the perhaps 100,000 who left,<sup>1</sup> many went to Portugal where, in 1497, the vast majority were forcibly converted to Christianity by D. Manuel I.<sup>2</sup> Though initially protected from inquisitorial investigations into the nature of their Christian faith, these *crisãos novos* would eventually be persecuted by inquisitors just as their forebears had been in Castile and Aragon. Many fled to the Ottoman Empire, Italian principalities, the Netherlands and North Africa; however others remained in the Iberian possessions, both in Europe and in the New World, and in these areas some of them retained elements of their Jewish faith in a covert manner.

A much less well-worn strand of the story of the Sephardim, however, is their presence and influence in the Portuguese trading posts of West Africa. This topic will be examined through documents that have hitherto been neglected by Africanists, the inquisitorial records of the New World. These show not only that there was a significant Sephardic presence in Angola and Guinea, but that these Portuguese settlements were crucial in the development of an active crypto-Jewish diaspora across the Atlantic which was subject to widespread persecutions in Cartagena, Lima and Mexico in the middle years of the seventeenth century.

## Persecution of Portuguese Jews by the Inquisition in Lima and Cartagena

These persecutions began in Peru. In 1635, the inquisitors of Lima uncovered what they termed a “*gran complicidad*”—what they saw to be a Jewish plot by many of the most powerful merchants of the Viceroyalty. Scores of people were tried for being Jewish heretics, and some were “relaxed” to the secular arm—that is, they were handed over to the secular authorities to be executed in the *Auto da Fé* of 23 January 1639.

One of those executed in this way was Juan de Acevedo. Acevedo was born in 1609, and originated from Lisbon.<sup>3</sup> Asked by the inquisitors where and when he first began to practice the Jewish faith, Acevedo answered that when he first went to Angola, at the age of sixteen, he fell ill:

“and a doctor came to see him called Manuel Alvarez, who was Portuguese; and learning over the course of his illness, that the Defendant (Azevedo) was a Christian, [Alvarez] said to him, that he lived in error because the faith of the Christians was one that worshipped idols of stone and wood.”<sup>4</sup>

Acevedo wished to denounce Alvarez, and the following day a priest visited him, whereupon Acevedo related what had befallen him. The priest berated Acevedo, telling him that since the doctor had only wished to “enlighten him on the true path which was that of the Law of Moses, so he should do him no harm.”<sup>5</sup> Invited to eat a meal by one Juana Mendez, Acevedo soon found himself pressed to fast for Yom Kippur, where

“they all went in to pray in the said room where the lanterns were, with the doctor taking up a book from which he read prayers from the Law of Moses, and those who were present responded in the same manner; and when the doctor tired the cleric picked up the said book, and continued with the Reading, and that was how they remained until midday, without extinguishing the lanterns...”<sup>6</sup>

Once the great fast of the Jewish faith had ended, the congregants ate a communal meal of fish and fruit, which had been prepared the night before.<sup>7</sup> Acevedo’s evidence is certainly suggestive of an active population of crypto-Jews in Angola in the early seventeenth century. Indeed, had the inquisitors of Lima compared notes with their fellow inquisitors in Cartagena, in what was then the *Nuevo Reino de Granada*, and wished to instruct the inquisitors of Lisbon to instigate proceedings in Angola, they would have found ample materials with which to do so.

Contemporaneously with the trials in Lima, a group of crypto-Jews living in Cartagena was being tried by the Inquisitorial Tribunal of that city. One of those being tried was Manuel Alvarez Prieto, an important trader in Cartagena. One of the witnesses against Alvarez Prieto was Blas de Paz Pinto, another Jew, who stated that he had started judaising thirty years previously [circa 1606] in Lisbon, and that “he had then gone to Angola where he had found the said manuel alvarez prieto,”<sup>8</sup> and that Alvarez Prieto “had taught again the said law”<sup>9</sup> to Blas de Paz Pinto.

Alvarez Prieto himself claimed that “approximately twenty-two years ago, when he was in angola Diego de Santillana who is already dead taught him the law of Moses.”<sup>10</sup> He claimed that many people had come to him in Cartagena and confessed to being active Jews, including one “Juan Fernandez de Azamor who declared himself as a Jew observant of the law of Moses in Angola, along with a friend of his called Antonio Nunez da Costa.”<sup>11</sup>

It is of course impossible to say whether this Manuel Alvarez Prieto is the same as the Manuel Alvarez who proselytised Acevedo, although the absence of any record of Alvarez Prieto having been a doctor would argue against such an identification. Nevertheless, the links between the crypto-Jewish networks of Lima, Cartagena and Angola is further confirmed by another aspect of Acevedo’s evidence. Acevedo testified against one Francisco Rodriguez Carnero, resident in Cartagena, who, he claimed, had also sought to proselytise him, and “had taught him the mosaic law in angola, and that through his teaching he had performed fasts, prayers and ceremonies of the said law.”<sup>12</sup> That the nexus of Angola included São Tomé was confirmed by the evidence of one of the witnesses against Alvarez Prieto, Francisco Rodriguez de Solíz, who stated that

“he had been taught to observe [the aw of Moses] by Juan fernandez angel, who was now dead, living at the home of this defendant [Soliz] around ten years ago...with angel having come from sanctome.”<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the perennial difficulty facing those who study the records of the Inquisition, namely what one is to make of evidence that has been exacted from people through torture—a difficulty which recent events have shown to be as pressing today as it was in the seventeenth century—this material alone would be enough to suggest that crypto-Jews were active in Angola. Nevertheless, the material suggests that West Africa was not only a hotbed of crypto-Jewry, but a place where Catholics were actively converted to the Mosaic faith.

Let us consider further the evidence of Juan de Acevedo. He claims that, when he arrived in Cartagena from Angola, he went to visit Francisco

Rodriguez Carnero in the latter's home: "and finding himself with one Manuel de Sosa the said Carnero said to him, see here is one who we taught the law of moses to in angola."<sup>14</sup> The language is specific: Acevedo is *one* of those who have been converted to Judaism in Angola; that is, there are others of whom the same is true; and, furthermore, a legitimate interpretation might be that it is common practice to attempt the conversion of people to Judaism in Angola. That this interpretation is valid will be shown by switching attention from Angola to Guinea.

Another of those "relaxed" to the secular authorities in the 1639 *Auto da Fé* of Lima was Antonio de Espinoza. Espinoza related the process of his conversion to Judaism as follows:

"in may or june of [1]631 he took ship in cadiz with captain Pero Correa who was going to Guine in a ship; Correa was a Portuguese merchant, who took the defendant in his poop-deck cabin, and in many conversations which they had over the course of the journey persuaded him of the merits of the law of Moses, which the defendant resisted at first."<sup>15</sup>

However, Espinoza's resistance was of little effect. Arriving in Guinea,

"four other portuguese men gathered, who he named along with the said Captain Correa, and they all said to the prisoner so many things about the law of moses, discussing it with the prisoner at great length, and saying how god had given the law of Moses in the mountain, and how when coming down from it he had found the people of Israel had committed idolatries; [and they had] wasted over a sheet of paper in elaborating this, so that in the end the defendant resolved to observe the said law."<sup>16</sup>

Espinoza's evidence implies that there was a veritable team of proselytes waiting in Guinea—more precisely, in Cacheu, as is made clear by subsequent denunciations made by him<sup>17</sup>—to convert passing Portuguese. Not only did the ship's captain and the people in Guinea wish to convert him, but another crewmember told Espinoza that the truth lay with the Mosaic Law. Furthermore, the vagaries of trade meant that the party spent eight months in Guinea, during which time they observed the fast of Yom Kippur and kept the Jewish Sabbath every week.<sup>18</sup> Although Espinoza retracted the evidence during his trial, he later said that what he had claimed of Guinea and Cacheu was true.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Espinoza was not the only victim of the *gran complicidad* to have learnt his Judaism in Guinea. The same was also true of Sebastian Duarte, the brother-in-law of the alleged ringleader of Lima's Jews, Manuel Bautista Perez. In his evidence, given without being under torture, Duarte confessed that

“being in Guinea in the year of [16]19, and the prisoner [Duarte] being 18 years old, and dealing in a store of merchandise belonging to an uncle of his called Phelipe Rodriguez, one Diego de Albuquerque taught him the law of Moses.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Duarte later retracted the evidence, documents from Cartagena show that he had strong connections with known traders from Cacheu and support the veracity of his original claims.

Meanwhile, in the trial of Manuel Bautista Perez, himself one of the witnesses, Juan Rodriguez Duarte, confessed that he was Jewish and had “observed the law of moses, taught him in guinea by one francisco rodriguez de acosta and Juan Rodrigues de acosta and alvaro goncalez frances.”<sup>21</sup> Although this evidence was given under torture, there is a certain corroboration lent to it through the fact that Alvaro Goncalez Frances (known in Portuguese documents as Gonçalves Frances) was also accused of judaizing by Juan Rodriguez Mesa in Cartagena, albeit also under torture.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the presence of an active branch of the Rodriguez de Acosta family in Guinea is at least partially corroborated by the evidence of a slave ship captain called Antonio Rodriguez de Acosta sailing from Seville for Guinea in 1618.<sup>23</sup>

The American inquisitors of the 1630s had, therefore, a rich seam of evidence as to the importance of the trading posts of West Africa in converting people to Judaism. It was not just that crypto-Jews came from Africa to the Americas: many of them claimed to have been converted there in the first place. Furthermore, such tales were not new. As far back as 1623, the trader Garci Mendez de Dueñas was imprisoned in Lima on suspicion of being a Jew; then 58, he confessed that at the age of fifteen [circa 1580] he went to Lisbon

“where he took ship for guinea in the company of his brother-in-law called Rui Mendez, and that they had been in the São Domingos River [Cacheu] making up a party of slaves to take to the indies.”<sup>24</sup>

During this journey, Mendez “persuaded him that there was only One true God...and that there was no other law but that which God had given to moses.”<sup>25</sup>

The trial of Garci Mendez dragged on. On 11 January 1624 he became desperate, telling the inquisitors that for two days he had been unable to sleep thinking of his troubles. In response,

“having been consoled by the said Lord Inquisitor and been warned of the great deal that depended on his saying clearly and openly the truth, that

he should think hard about saying it, and he was ordered to return to his cell.”<sup>26</sup>

The following morning Garci Mendez was found hanged in his cell.

## The Portuguese Inquisition and West Africa

As well as revealing the institutional inhumanity of the Inquisition, this case is of interest as it reveals that conversions to Judaism had been occurring on the Guinea coast for many decades. Furthermore, by the time that this evidence was collected in the Americas in the 1630s, the inquisitors of Lisbon, under whose jurisdiction both Guinea and Angola fell, had long been aware of both the presence of *cristãos novos* in West Africa, and of their proselytising activities there. There is evidence of this in the Inquisition archives in Portugal.

On 21 May 1592, an inquiry was made to the *Conselho Geral do Santo Officio* in Lisbon with regard to one

“Luis preto who is at present detained, the prosecuting Judge having placed his ship, bound for Guine[a] under an embargo; owing to the fact that it was carrying on board Enrique de Solis, and Francisco Fernandez, of the New Christian nation.”<sup>27</sup>

At this time, the *cristãos novos* of Portugal were barred from leaving the kingdom without the permission of the king. As this permission had not been granted, Luís Preto had acted unlawfully—and the perceived danger of the presence of *cristãos novos* in Guinea is underlined by the action which the state had taken against him.

Almost exactly a year later, on 11 May 1593, in a letter to the *Conselho Geral*, Pero Rodrigues, visitor of the Jesuit mission in Angola, wrote that São Paulo de Luanda was rife with Jews and heretics of all descriptions:

“To Judaism belong [the errors] which declare that the sentence of Pilate against Christ was just, and had a great basis. That those who die at the hands of the Holy Office are martyrs. A Torah was found here, and on this Maundy Thursday some people gathered to have a celebratory meal at the house of someone whose faith is deemed very suspicious...”<sup>28</sup>

Rodrigues claimed that the *provisor*, Manoel Roiz Teixeira, was a great friend of the *gente da nação*, as the *cristãos novos* were sometimes known, and concluded that

“to be safe it would be advisable to send here a person with the requisite powers to reside here [in San Pablo de Loanda] as it is a healthy place, and to have [members of the] religious [orders] who can be helped with jurisdiction over Congo, the island of Príncipe, and São Tomé, which are full of New Christians.”<sup>29</sup>

Pero Rodrigues’s evidence not only reveals the extent of the presence of crypto-Jews in Angola, Congo and São Tomé, but also implies that the Luandan branch was a fully functioning community, with a Torah, no less, with which divine services could be held. This would seem to be a condition of the sort of proselytising activity, which we have adduced from the evidence of the American Inquisitions, and to confirm the impression that West Africa was a centre for the conversion of Catholics to Judaisers.

Yet the archives of the Inquisition of Lisbon are empty of trials of Judaisers from West Africa. While there are not a few denunciations in the *Libros de Denuncias* or the *Cadernos do Promotor*, the lists of the *Autos da Fé* from Lisbon are light on prisoners from Cacheu or Luanda. Indeed, it is probably this very fact, which encouraged the freedom of worship, which appears to have been the norm there.

There are several reasons which explain how and why this lack of interest might have developed. This comparative lack of inquisitorial interest in West Africa was slow to develop. Indeed, the archives of the early years of the Lisbon tribunal contain a number of references to activities in West Africa. In 1551, the jurisdiction of the Inquisition of Lisbon was extended to cover the Portuguese possessions in the Atlantic<sup>30</sup>, and it was doubtless under these auspices that the inquisitors turned their attention to Cabo Verde. A document from the *Torre do Tombo* (ANTT) shows that in the same year, they nominated a visitor to go to Cabo Verde in order to “conduct an investigation regarding the things which touch on the holy office”, one of which were the *cristãos novos*.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately the results of this journey of inquiry have not been preserved for posterity. Nevertheless, it is possible to glean from several other documents that the *cristãos novos* of Cabo Verde and Guinea remained a source of concern for the Lisbon inquisitors for quite some time thereafter. In June 1558, António Varela was appointed *procurador* of the *cristãos novos* of Santiago de Cabo Verde, with the special task of enforcing all laws which prohibited them from living there.<sup>32</sup> In January 1563, the pilot of the ship *Esperança* was given several letters to take to the bishop of Cabo Verde, with information about *cristãos novos* living there.<sup>33</sup> Then, in September 1567, further letters were sent to the bishop urging him to make some more inquiries.<sup>34</sup> Nor was Cabo Verde alone in