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THE CITY'S SILENT DOUBLE: PUBLIC CEMETERIES IN ANGOLA FROM THE ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE SCRAMBLE

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Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate that an historical understanding of the introduction of public cemeteries in Angola is feasible, although dependent on the study of a wider context: the “Lusophone Atlantic”. Taking this premise into account, before analyzing how the new Romantic ideals clashed at Luanda and Benguela (the two major Angolan urban spaces of the 19th century) with the ongoing Baroque traditions of the local elites – as well as the native costumes – a brief overview of what went on at Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro during the Romantic cemetery “revolution” is essayed.

Keywords: “Lusophone Atlantic”, public cemeteries, Romantic cemeteries, Luanda burial practices, slave graveyards and mass graves

In order to introduce the framework through which the study of public cemeteries in Angola is to be approached, Paul Gilroy's seminal concept of the "Black Atlantic" – as a space of transnational cultural construction (Gilroy, 1993) – has to be fully acknowledged. Although part of the appeal of Gilroy's notion stems from its ability to demolish the spurious borders entrenching the various African Diasporas studies along national and/or ethnic lines – thus producing *one single, complex unit of analysis* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 15) – a more specific area within this immense space, in which the matters presently studied are to be contextualized, can be fruitfully delimited: the Portuguese speaking parcel of the "Black Atlantic". Following Roger Sansi and Nicolau Parés suggestion, the term "Lusophone Atlantic" is to be adopted as a convenient handle to refer to this intermediary space (Sansi & Parés, 2011). This demarcation will allow the considerable narrowing of scope of the present investigation, while, hopefully, still sustaining enough *overture* to articulate an analysis based on *an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 15). Taking the two main coastal cities of Angola (Luanda and Benguela) as one of the vertices of the triangle-shaped "Lusophone Atlantic", two other vertices immediately become obvious and are thus taken into account in the present study: Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro, the main destinations of the slaves bought at both these African ports (Pereira, 2007; Tinhorão, 1988).

During the last couple of decades, a lot of studies have been published about public graveyards and cemeteries (or Christian graveyards¹) at the European and American shores of the "Lusophone Atlantic", focusing either on the Romantic cemetery "revolution" of the beginning

¹The term is derived from the Late Latin word *coemētērium*, directly related to the Greek term *koimētērion* – meaning "a room for sleeping", a noun that was created from the verb *koiman*, "to put to sleep" (Catroga, 1999, p. 41-42). This etymology deeply anchors the noun "cemetery" within the Christian tradition, not only because the belief that the deceased were just sleeping was an essential part of Christian eschatology, but also because, during the early times of Christian persecution, these spaces were the sole refuge of the early congregations (Catroga, 1999, p. 41).

of the 19th century, or on the later, Comtian-inspired, celebrations of the death of great men, centenaries and similar *pro* or *para-republican* civic rituals. In Portugal, Fernando Catorga's *O ceu da Memória*² established itself as a benchmark of cemetery studies, while in Brazil, João José Reis' *Death is a Festival* became a truly seminal work (Catroga, 1999; Reis, 2003). Recently, some of the monographs about public graveyards that began to be published in Brazil were solely devoted to the graveyards where slaves, freed slaves (*libertos* or *forros*), black men and creoles were buried (for instance Júlio da Silva Pereira's *À flor da terra: o cemitério dos pretos novos do Rio de Janeiro*³). This shift gave rise to a number of interesting questions whose answers, it became immediately clear, could only be reached via a comparative analysis of the historical records from the different sides of the "Lusophone Atlantic".

From 1998 onwards, the sharing of information between Brazilian and Portuguese scholars has been steadily increasing, and some interesting results have come to light (Silva & Saraiva, 2013, p. 223). Nevertheless, when it gets to the comparison between the Angolan reality to those of Rio de Janeiro or Lisbon during the 19th century, the authors that actually undertake this risky endeavor often choose to base their analysis either on later ethnographical data (reifying African "traditions" as specially stable ones) or on "Bantu philosophical" synthesis⁴ (as a way of figuring out supposedly "Bantu" immanent postures towards "Death", an endeavor which is clearly problematic). Contrarily to these practices, in this paper it is argued that the history of cemeteries, public graveyards and local attitudes towards death in Angola – although riddled with the same difficulties that any other historical research about this context is plagued with (namely the lack of written sources not authored or influenced by the colonial administration or

²"Memory as a heaven".

³"A shallow grave: Rio de Janeiro's new black slaves' cemetery".

⁴ Probably the best known Portuguese language "Bantu philosophical" synthesis is the one undertaken by the Roman Catholic priest Raul Ruiz de Asúa Altuna, *Cultura Tradicional Banta* ("Traditional Bantu Culture")(Altuna, 2006).

westerners) – is as feasible as any other, and can in fact be a better base for a transnational cooperation between Angolan, Brazilian and Portuguese scholars.

The *Poço dos Negros* and the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*: two *Ancien Régime* solutions to the same urban problem

It is a well established fact that the enlightened critique of religion paved the way to the Romantic cemetery “revolution”, by ascertaining the main topics through which the Later Medieval consensus surrounding Christian burial practices was to be criticized (Catroga, 1999). Public health, the dilatory effects of superstitious behaviors, practices, and beliefs, and the impossibility of an individualistic and at the same time equalitarian cult of memory⁵, became talking points through which the enlightened elites questioned the ongoing popular funerary practices, while still maintaining an Absolutist and pre-Romantic frame of mind (Catroga, 1999, p. 42-53). The solutions found in answer to these radical critiques were often urbanistic in nature, as any radical questioning of the whole *polis* is bound to produce new urban planning practices, and were homogenous enough throughout the main European Catholic regions (the Iberian and Italian peninsulas, as well as parts of France) to enable their study as a single, coherent, cultural movement.

One interesting aspect that set apart what was going on then at the Portuguese Empire from the far better studied realities of the other Catholic spaces was the fact that both its metropolitan

⁵ While the *ad sanctos apud ecclesiam* burial was in principle a deeply equalitarian one – every baptized Christian was to be anonymously buried inside the physical enclosure of the Church –, soon the practice of dedicating tombstones or chapels to the rich or otherwise influential members of the community put an end to this *quasi-utopian* equalitarianism. When the Late Medieval communitarian conceptions of life began to be substituted by the new individualistic liberal ideals, the aristocratic practice of differentiating the resting place of the dead within the Church slowly became a popular aspiration: equality was no longer to be achieved through the anonymous cult of all the community’s dead (ending the aristocratic privilege), but by the individual remembrance of every single deceased (by offering everyone the old privilege of the elites, a named resting place) (Catroga, 1999, p. 42-53).

and colonial urban cultures were deeply imbued with a centuries-old slaveholding ethos. Taking this fact into account, it is thus necessary – before continuing to the study of the subsequent Romantic innovations – to briefly overview the ways in which the Portuguese urbanite society (both at Lisbon and at Rio de Janeiro) dealt with a precise urban planning problem, central to it prior to the whitewashing of the “Lusophone Atlantic” influences that took place at the end of the 19th century (Tinhorão, 1988): the disposal of the bodies of the deceased slaves.

At least until the reign of D. Manuel I (1495-1521), a secular tradition of not burying the dead slaves’ bodies was kept⁶ (Catroga, 1999, p. 77-78). The remains of the servants were simply thrown outside of the city gates, into *puticuli*, or “little pits”, where they were left to rot; or into the river Tagus, from St. Catherina’s Steep (Catroga, 1999, p. 77-78). D. Manuel I reformed this custom, by ordering the creation in 1515 of the *Poço dos Negros*⁷, a deep dry well where the slaves’ bodies were to be thrown. This pit was to be regularly disinfected with *cal virgem*⁸ and water, and was located outside of the city gates. The *Poço dos Negros* was only to be replaced by the mass graves of the new Romantic graveyards: *Cemitério dos Prazeres* (1833) and *Alto de S. João* (1833) – both built following a severe cholera epidemic (Catroga, 1999, p. 77-78). In 2009, a similar Pit dating from the 15th century was found at Lagos, Algarve, the first Portuguese port to receive whole shiploads of African slaves (Henriques, 2011, p. 10), proving that at the time of its adoption, the solution proposed by D. Manuel I was already a tested and accepted one.

Although most of the slaves thrown into the *Poços* were probably baptized Christians, their rights as such were completely ignored. Not only were they not buried *ad sanctos apud ecclesiam* (“next to the saints”, inside a church or churchyard) like other Christians, but they were literally thrown out of the *urbis* they served during life – at a time when *extra-urbe* burials

⁶ This practice was probably established during the Roman occupation of the Peninsula) (Catroga, 1999, p. 77-78).

⁷ “Pit for Black Africans”.

⁸ Quicklime.

were reserved, according to the Catholic tradition, only to the excommunicated, the Muslims, Jews and Pagans, as well as the suicidal (Catroga, 1999). Until the 18th century, the only alternative to this fate – a grim one from a Christian perspective – was offered by becoming a member of a brotherhood such as *Confraria de Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Homens Pretos de Lisboa*⁹ (Tinhorão, 1988). These brotherhoods, popular in Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro and other large Portuguese and Brazilian towns¹⁰, presented to their members a chance of planning their burials beforehand, *ad sanctos*, and with a decent enough funeral procession – an essential part of the Baroque burial ritual (Catroga, 1999, p.41; Pereira, 2007, p. 32). Regarding such brotherhoods, an interesting omission in their range of action has to be noted: no lobbying against the use of the collective pits, or mass graves, was ever by them articulated, nor was the actual “rescue” of bodies from the pits ever enacted (Tinhorão, 1988; Pereira, 2007). From the 18th century onwards, the records of the *Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Lisboa*¹¹ – an institution that undertook the burial of the poor and destitute, including slaves and freed slaves – show that this charity presented a free of charge and somewhat less degrading alternative to the *Poço dos Negros*: the mass grave¹².

Shifting the focus of the analysis towards what was going on in Rio de Janeiro, at the beginning of the 19th century, it becomes clear that, there too, a slave could be buried in several

⁹ “Lisbon’s Our Lady of the Rosary Black Men’s Brotherhood”.

¹⁰ According to Lucilene Reginaldo, at the beginning of the 18th century, there were at least nine brotherhoods in Lisbon that only accepted members from the black population. Still according to this author, the oldest “black men’s brotherhood” established outside of the Portuguese capital was created at Évora during the 16th century, and the second largest Portuguese city, Oporto, counted with four such brotherhoods at the height of their popularity (Reginaldo, 2009, p. 297-299).

¹¹ “The Holy House of Mercy of Lisbon”; a Portuguese charity founded in 1498 by Queen Leonor of Portugal, which provided the *motto* to the similar institutions created throughout the Portuguese Empire.

¹² The *Santa Casa de Misericórdia de Lisboa* first burial records date from 1756, and state that this institution provided a Christian burial to 1.235 people – 16.8% of which were classified as “black” or “colored” (Reginaldo, 2009, p. 293). From then onwards, the yearly minimum percentage of black people the charity provided the last rites for was of at least 12.7% (during 1765) (Reginaldo, 2009, p. 293).

different ways. If part of a brotherhood, then a slave's funerary rites wouldn't be so different from those of the Brothers of Our Lady of the Rosary, back at Lisbon. If not, then a small gamut of possible fates was reserved to the body of the deceased servant. The ones that lived at the rural hinterland were often buried *like beasts of burden*, according to the Archbishop of Bahia, D. Sebastião Monteiro da Vide (1707). When this cleric wrote his *Constituições primeiras do Arcebispado da Bahia*¹³, he instituted a fee (*cinquenta cruzados*¹⁴) and the penalty of excommunication to those slave masters that refrained from burying their baptized slaves' bodies *ad sanctos* (Pereira, 2007, p. 65-67). The last remains of the urbanite slaves that did not belong to any brotherhood were destined to the mass graves of the cemetery of *Santo António*, next to the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia*¹⁵, and the cemetery of *Largo de São Domingos* (reserved to the *mullatos*) (Pereira, 2007, p. 36-37; Rodrigues, 1997). Both these cemeteries were within the urban perimeter of Rio de Janeiro, thus indicating that at this colonial metropolis – at least on a symbolic level – the slaves were granted the most basic of citizenship rights: a burial inside the city limits.

This state of affairs drastically changed by the end of the 18th century (1772), when a new graveyard was created outside the limits of the city¹⁶ (Pereira, 2007, p. 37). This latest cemetery, the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*¹⁷, was destined to be the final destination of the slaves that died before being sold by the shippers to their new masters (Pereira, 2007). This graveyard became infamous due to the shallowness of its graves (no more than a couple of inches deep), and the

¹³ “The first constitution of the Archbishopric See of Bahia”.

¹⁴ “fifty” *cruzados*.

¹⁵ The local “Holy House of Mercy”.

¹⁶ One already existed “beyond the pale”, but it was destined to protestants only – the *Cemitério dos Ingleses*, or “the British Cemetery” (Pereira, 2007, p. 37).

¹⁷ “The New [meaning recently arrived] Black Slaves’ Cemetery”.

large number of burials per year it was witness to¹⁸ (Pereira, 2007, p. 80-87). No slave or freed slave ever committed the body of a fellow to be buried there – a fact that can certainly ascertain its infamous reputation amidst the African and Afro-Brazilian communities (Pereira, 2007). With the formal end of the transatlantic slave trade (1827), and abiding to crescent hygienist pressures, the Rio de Janeiro Town Hall finally closed this cemetery by 1830, thus reaffirming its growing secular independence from the ecclesiastical power – until then a huge player when it came to town planning (Pereira, 2007).

Both the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* and the *Poço dos Negros* were closed roughly at the same time (1830; 1833), and both were quickly officially forgotten, in a clear attempt of the Portuguese and Brazilian elites to distance themselves from the now unfashionable slave trade – thus denying the descendents of the slaves their right to a significant place of memory or *lieux de mémoire*. Both spaces were situated *extra-muros* (outside of the city walls) or *extra-urbe*, and both were considered by the Catholic elite as a humiliating last destination. Despite this, it is a fact that the black men's brotherhoods never interfered in their workings, either “rescuing” bodies, or lobbying against them. Besides the fact that no slave or freed slave ever had a fellow buried in either site, little is known about these populations' perception of both spaces.

According to Júlio da Silva Pereira, in order to flesh out the slaves' perception of these burial grounds, it is necessary to turn towards Angola, the place of origin of a large percentage of them (Pereira, 2007, p. 141-182). In his opinion, the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* was perceived as particularly degrading because the Bantu that were buried there believed that without some minimum rituals their spirits could never become “ancestors”¹⁹ – so being buried at the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* amounted to a second, social, and definitive death. Even worse than

¹⁸ Roughly a thousand corpses were buried each year in a yard the size of a soccer field (Pereira, 2007, p. 80-87).

¹⁹ Pereira clearly is an adept of the “*Bantu philosophical*” *synthesis* solution.

that, the author claims, the uncared for bodies were pointed out as the possible source of *muzimos*, a kind of revenant spirits, which could torment the whole community (Pereira, 2007, p. 167-169).

If the burial at the *Poço dos Negros* and the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* posed such a private and communal threat, the question of why the social body did not intervene to stop such a risk – via the brotherhoods – imposes itself. Arguably, that was the case because the personal danger of dying a second death was perceived as an exclusively private drama, thus not warranting any kind of collective action. From the point of view of a slave, a second death might have seemed tragic, but from the perspective of most of the citizens of the “Lusophone Atlantic”, a slave being just a *quasi-human* commodity, “its” ultimate destiny was unnoticeable to begin with. Even former slaves were presented with a dilemma, when considering the status of their former companions in hardship: as the slaves were individuals probably accused of sorcery, until they could dissipate this particular imputation, they were regarded as someone whose memory was simply not fit for preservation. Only after gaining some social capital (by entering a brotherhood, being publicly baptized, marrying, or otherwise having his or hers status improved), or by proving his or hers innocence regarding sorcery charges, could an individual slave expect some communal help in avoiding such a fate²⁰. As for the fear of *muzimos*, this anxiety was probably dealt with casuistically by the emerging African-American religions.

This ingrained suspicion that slaves and former slaves harbored towards their own fellows in adversity, once combined with the elites’ revisionist politics of memory, ultimately meant that the memory associated with the burial grounds of the vast majority of the slaves that lived in the

²⁰ According to Silva Pereira, at Rio de Janeiro the public consumption of salt, in conjugation with a Christian baptism, was taken as a proof that a slave accused of practicing sorcery was in fact innocent. This custom presented the slaves with a dilemma: either maintain a certain aura of supernatural power, or publicly prove their “innocence”, thus gaining the support of the community towards achieving Christian life goals (like a “decent” funeral) (Pereira, 2007, p. 40).

“Lusophone Atlantic” was to be lost, as it was neither preserved by the slaves and their descendants, nor by the Portuguese or Brazilian elites (Pereira, 2007, p. 179). As the transatlantic slave trade became illegal, hygienist and other secular pressures put an end to the mass anonymous burial of slaves and the destitute, the *Poço dos Negros* and the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos*²¹ were then definitively erased as places of memory. Curiously, in this particular instance, the double consciousness of the African Brazilian and African Portuguese communities was a catalyst of their memory loss: while its members strived to access some of the Christian rituals, their simultaneous faith in the reality of the sorcery accusations behind the enslavement of their peers meant that the collective disregard towards the memory of the slaves thrown to the *Poço dos Negros* or buried at the *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* was not only accepted, but deemed as proper.

Angola – from a Baroque aesthetic towards death to an enforced silence

After concluding this brief summary of what was going on until the beginning of the 19th century at the two other vertices of the “Lusophone Atlantic”, the focus can now be turned towards Angola, in order to verify which were the consequences of the Romantic cemetery “revolution”, over at this particular colonial territory. The first of such effects to become clear is the end of the Creole compromise achieved during the late Enlightenment, which was the basis of an established truce between the Catholic authorities and the non-Christian locals. According to this unwritten compromise, the nearly inexistent Catholic priests would only interfere with the local funerary traditions if the deceased were baptized (and were not excommunicated). This

²¹ The *Cemitério dos Pretos Novos* was quite literally lost, having only been archeologically found at the beginning of the last decade (Pereira, 2007, p. 199-201). As for the *Poço dos Negros*, its name was kept as a topographic reminder, but an increasingly whitewashed interpretation of its meaning was promoted: *Poço dos Negros* can also mean “the well used only by black people”, and this understanding kept gaining currency.

ceasefire also rested on the hegemony of a “Baroque aesthetics” towards death, which enabled the westernized elite to peacefully co-opt the local exuberant festive practices.

From Feo Cardozo’s memories (1825) it is possible to establish that until the 19th century²² the only interference from the Catholic Church in the local funerary practices was the charging of a fee whenever a baptized body was put to rest in a *monturo*²³ – the tombs assembled according to non-Christian rites (Cardozo, 1825, p. 282-283). The charge was worth 50 *cruzados* (the same amount paid in Brazil for the burial of slaves *as beasts of burden*, minus the excommunication), as set by the Constitutions of the Luanda and Congo Bishopric. Cardozo also provides a description of the “gentile” burial rites, that he uses the term *mutambe* to designate:

...it is a great gathering of both sexes, during which, with superstitious rituals and ridiculous ceremonies, lewd singings and dishonest dances, the Negroes celebrate their last rites, bragging about all the known misdeeds of the deceased, the number of consorts they had, having it been either a man or a woman: they also worship an idol (iteque), while stating if the deceased was circumcised or not, and accompanying the whole scene with unworthy behavior; being this ugly sight deeply annoying, and their state of drunkenness an utmost one. [...] they believe that with this act, the zumbi (soul) of the dead reaches eternal rest. To this accomplishment of the Tambe, they call Mutambe (Cardozo, 1825, p. 276-278).²⁴

This habit of loudly celebrating the departure of the recently deceased proved to be a particularly resilient one. The Bishop of Angola and Congo, Joaquim Moreira Reis, was forced in 1852 to forbid it by means of a circular, published at the Official Bulletin. According to him,

²² Older descriptions of the funerary rites that took place at the colony can be found at João Giovanni Antônio Cavazzi de Montecúccolo’s (1622-1678) work entitled *Descrição Histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola* (“Historical description of the three kingdoms of the Congo, Matamba and Angola”).

²³ “Small mound”.

²⁴ *...he hum ajuntamento de ambos os sexos, no qual, com ritos supersticiosos, ceremonias ridiculas, cantigas lascivas e danças deshonestas, celebraõ os Negrs as suas exequias, elogiando todas as torpezas que sabem do morto, quantas cuncubinas teve, e isto em ambos os sexos: ajuntando tambem a circunstancia, de adorarem o idolo (Iteque) dizendo se eraõ circumcizados ou não, acompanhando com acçoens indignas todo o referido; irritando aquelles feios quadros, as muitas bebidas que os embriagaõ. [...] crendo que n'este acto, o Zumbi (alma) entra no descanso eterno. A este cumprimento do Tambe, chamaõ Mutambe.*

the *custom that in* the city of Luanda was *called Itamas* consisted – pretty much like the *mutambe* – in a cheerful and loud reunion at the cemetery, by the occasion of the funerals (Boletim Official da Provincia d'Angola, 1852). Still according to the Bishop, people from all walks of life took part of these ceremonies, which was a shame to the city of Luanda. Another leading author, Elias Alexandre, in his *Historia de Angola* (History of Angola, published in 1937 but written at the end of the 18th century), would thus characterize the sensibility of the Creole elite towards death:

...they have a considerable expenditure with the transport services – even more than with the divine cult. Their last rites, and funeral, are strewn with candles; and there is no poor relative, that doesn't order a mass for the dead for the souls of those that usually were as Pagan as they were Christian (Alexandre, 1937, p. 127).²⁵

From these two passages, it becomes clear that a local “Baroque aesthetics” towards death continued to be deeply influential well into the third decade of the 19th century and that such an anachronism provided invaluable contact points between the culture of the elite, and the “traditional” or “gentile” practices. Sumptuous, luxurious, and “orgiastic” or loud funerary rites remained thus tolerable, until the new liberal ideals were finally forced into the colony.

From the memories of Tito Omboni, an Italian doctor and voyager, it is possible to get an account of the cemeteries of the two major Angolan towns, written between 1834 and 1835. These descriptions are quite remarkable, because they picture a time of deep changes, from the point of view of a European that understood the local practices of the colonials already as a picturesque survival of customs from bygone eras. In his *Viaggi nell'Africa occidentale* (1845), Omboni describes the funerary customs of Benguela the following way:

²⁵ *...tem consideravel gasto nas pompas funebres mais do q no Culto Divino. As Exequias, e Funeraes, são semeados de Luzes; e não há parente pobre, q deixe de engendrar hum officio de Defunctos, pela alma daquelle, q muitas vezes professou o Paganismo de meias com a Religião Christã.*

*The corpses of the rich are buried in the church, and those of the other Christians in a badly defended field, where the hyenas and the jackals enter at night to nibble on the bones. The idolaters bury them with great care, and overlap the tombstone with some sign of the condition in which the dead spent their lives (Omboni, 1845, p. 75-76).*²⁶

As for Luanda, this is what the author has to say:

*The cemetery of the lower town is located at about a half-mile from the public walk and is intended for poor whites and blacks, who cannot pay the costs of a burial inside the church.²⁷ The bodies are poorly covered and are often unburied by jackals and hyenas who enter through the ruined walls, and it is not uncommon – in the hottest hours of the day or in the most quiet ones of the night – the hearing of the horrible screams those fiends make while vying for the pitiful scraps of man. Several times, while passing through that part, I saw them flee uphill with tattered meat in their mouth, reaching for the forest to devour it (Omboni, 1845, p. 95).*²⁸

From the brutality of these descriptions, it would be possible to imagine that the portrayed graveyards were ghastly places, avoided at all costs by the natives and the colonial settlers. Contrary to this expectation, other sources relating the *itamas* and the *mutambe* indicate that that was not the case at all²⁹, so Omboni's descriptions can only be interpreted as a critique of Luanda's and Benguela's Creole society. The author seems to be particularly shocked by the inexistence of any kind of separation between the lower white classes and the black slaves, be

²⁶ *I cadaveri dei ricchi si seppelliscono nella chiesa, e gli altri cristiani in un campo mal difeso dove entrano di notte le jene ed i giacalli a scarnarne le ossa. Gli idolatri seppelliscono i loro con molta cura, e sovrappongono alla tomba qualche segno della condizione in cui trassero la vita.*

²⁷ Another graveyard was built during 1800 at the high town, called *Cemitério do Alto das Cruzes*, it was walled in 1859.

²⁸ *Il cimitero della città bassa è posto circa un mezzo miglio lungi il publico passeggio ed è destinato ai poveri si bianchi che negri i quali non possano pagare le spese della sepoltura in chiesa. I cadaveri mal coperti vengono disotterrati dai giacalli e dalle iene che vi entrano dai muri ruinosi, e non è raro nelle più calde ore del giorno o nelle più tranquille della notte, l'udire gli orribili urli di quelle fiere che si contendono i miserandi avanzi dell'uomo. Più volte mi occorse, passando per quella parte, vederle fuggire colle lacere carni in bocca cercando la selva per divorarle.*

²⁹ The chronicler Lopes de Lima and the economist Acúrcio das Neves refer to the ritual of *mutambe*, both agreeing on several points, and basing their writings on different sources (Lima, 1846, p. 156-158; Neves, 1830, p. 202-215).

they gentile or Christian, when it comes to the choice of last rites. As he points out, the *The idolaters bury* [their dead] *with great care, and overlap the tombstone with some sign of the condition in which the dead spent their lives*, while the burial sites of slaves and poor white colonists remain equally unmarked and undifferentiated (Omboni, 1845, p. 76). Another source of dread to the doctor was the noticeable disregard that the white settlers had during life towards their final resting place, and their own posthumous memory.

Omboni's memoirs thus provide evidence that at the time of his visit (1834-1835), the custom of burying the dead *ad sanctos* was still being practiced by the local colonial elite, and that the new Romantic liberal practice of individualizing the cult of the memory of the ancestors – until then collectively remembered *apud ecclesiam* – had neither been adopted by the local elite nor by the general population. This upset Omboni's new Romantic sensibility, as it seemed to him that only the *idolaters* were actually taking any kind of active steps in the preservation of the memory of their deceased.

Another privileged source of information about the various autochthonous funerary rites can be found at the descriptions of the burying rites of local chieftains, regularly printed at the *Boletim Official da Provincia d'Angola*³⁰ (from 1845 onwards). This practice, far from denoting a “pure” ethnographic interest, had an easily explained practical function: the Portuguese soon realized that if the precise funerary rites were not followed, the candidate whose enthronement they favored would not have his or hers sovereignty recognized, thus giving rise to countless destructive succession wars. By publicly publishing the said rituals, the administration was surely hoping to avoid such costly conflicts, by at the same time informing its agents and standardizing the local customs.

³⁰ “Official Bulletin of the Province of Angola”.

Taking into account the available sources, it can be summarized that in Angola, during the first half of the 19th century, the bodies of the deceased could only have a small number of fates. A few could still be buried *ad sanctos*, as those of the westernized Creole elite, or entombed according to the unique local rites reserved to the African elites (often described at the pages of the *Boletim Oficial*). The bodies of the vast majority of the population were to be consigned either to the public graveyard, or to the side of the road *monturos*. The only bodies left unburied and at the mercy of the wild beasts were those of the persons accused of performing sorcery (when killed on spot and not sold as slaves), and those of the teenagers that died during the circumcision rites (Gil, 1854, p. 21; Pereira, 2007, p.141-182).

It was only with the municipalism that Sá da Bandeira³¹ promoted since the middle of the century, as a way of shifting from military to civilian rule (and thus, the statesman hoped, accelerating the transition from a slavery based to a plantation based economy), that the idea to make it mandatory to bury the dead at public cemeteries finally came to the limelight. In an 1854 Ordinance, the general government of the colony pronounced that:

..In order to remove all the causes that have until today been in the way of the existence of public cemeteries in every District [area governed by a military leader] we decree that the practice, generally followed in this country, of having the dead buried by the public roads, in the musseques [slums] and other places ceases immediately: this is a barbarous practice, and an uncivilized one, that not only encourages the insalubrious nature of the climate, but also clearly opposes the development of a sentiment of piety and religion, that one needs to propagate and strengthen by ending this acts that clearly reveal a tendency towards gentilism (Boletim Oficial da Provincia d'Angola, 1854).³²

³¹ Bernardo de Sá Nogueira de Figueiredo, 1st Marquis de Sá da Bandeira, was a liberal Portuguese nobleman and politician. He was responsible for the decree that theoretically abolished the transatlantic slave trade (1836), and throughout his life occupied several high cabinet posts (including the one of Prime Minister), often related with the colonies. He always promoted a reforming agenda centered on the abolishment of forced labor, that he considered an inevitable first step towards the adoption of modern capitalistic practices.

³² *...cumprindo remover as causas que até hoje teem obstado ao estabelecimento de cemitérios públicos em todos os Distritos [...] acabe a pratica geralmente seguida neste paiz, de se fazerem os enterramentos nas estradas publicas, nos musseques, e outros sítios: pratica barbara, e anticivilizadora, que não só concorre para a insalubridade do clima, mas também se oppoem iminentemente a que se desenvolvam, como é mister, os sentimentos de*

From then on, it became part of the job of the Municipal Councils to police the funerary rites and the final resting places of the peoples they governed. In the second half of the 19th century, the settlements began to be pressured towards urbanization, and the colonial leaders soon realized the veracity of the popular saying *pas de cimetièrre, pas de citê*³³ (Catroga, 1999, p. 102). It would prove to be hard, though, to eradicate the exuberant funerary processions that both the Creole elite and the locals so favored. In the town of Dondo, for instance, the first Municipal Commission, tried to stamp out (by 1860) the following custom:

..they had the custom of burying the dead only after they are paraded through the streets of the town, and stopped at different doors, while collecting alms destined to pay for the orgy that always follows the funeral (Boletim Official da Provincia d'Angola, 1860).³⁴

Although public health is occasionally mentioned as the main reason to ban a specific local funerary rite (miasmas were still considered to be the sole cause of Malaria), the colonial administration would more often focus its reforming impetus on “orgiastic” and loud ceremonies, considered a completely distasteful and inappropriate way of honoring the memory of the dead. From the first Liberal colonial administrations onwards (1836), the old Baroque heritage was to be completely abandoned, while a Romantic aesthetic was progressively adopted. If the graveyards were to become the double of the city – the new planned city of the future – then they had to be just as policed, in order to avoid the seepage of the chaos of the *Ancien Régime*, and the promiscuity that it prompted, into the new order.

iedade, e religião que tão necessário é propagar, e fortalecer, acabando com estes actos que revelam uma marcada tendência para o gentilismo.

³³ “Without a cemetery there can be no city”.

³⁴ *..havia ali, pois, o costume de enterrarem os cadaveres depois d'estes terem [...] corrido as ruas da povoação e parado a diferentes portas, a que pediam esmolos que depois serviam para a orgia que sempre se segue aos óbitos...*

Besides pushing for municipalism and abolitionism, Sá da Bandeira also intended to change the nature of the colony in another profound way: by making it a settlement and plantation colony, instead of a penal one. To reach this aim, the settlement of European families was marked by him as a priority, and the means for the perpetuation of their stay actively sought. Although this project was not achieved until the second decade of the 20th century (during the first colonial government of the High Commissar Norton de Matos), from the *Scramble for Africa* onwards (since the 1890's), the effective occupation of the territory was increasingly achieved. This implied not only the creation of infrastructures such as schools and hospitals, but also the promotion of the construction of mausoleums, or family tombs, at the local cemeteries – a way of anchoring the newly arrived families to the colony.

In her highly informative overview of the ethnographical information about the intermingling of European and African funerary practices at Angola, Clara Saraiva, drawing on Jill Dias' essay *Mbali art – a case of acculturation*, relates how the import of tombstones from the Portuguese metropolis influenced local Ovimbali stonemasons, which were soon able to reproduce the gravestones locally (Saraiva, 2013, p. 198-199). While Saraiva's analysis is focused on the acculturation of European motifs and practices, what her work also reveals is the extent to which the local colonial elites became aware of the need to reaffirm their status by emulating the metropolitan funerary rites – and how the establishment of local mausoleums or family graves implied a radical cut in relation to the metropolis, no longer the place where the ancestors of the colonial elite came to rest (Saraiva, 2013, p. 199-200).

The new tombs, the colonial administrators expected, would come to occupy a privileged place at the public graveyards, marking the ongoing suppression of the old Creole elites, which insisted in being buried *ad sanctos*. The new arrangement of the graveyards would herald a new

configuration of the cities: its segregated, hygienic, quiet and pedagogical environment truly constituting a town-planning manifesto. The memory of the dead slaves and poor white *degradados*³⁵ (the men once sent to the penal colony) was to be totally erased, and all the Africans were to be accepted in this new layout as equally destitute: no special graves, remembering the deeds of its occupants, or *orgiastic* funerary rites. The imposition of the Romantic graveyard was thus, and above all, the affirmation of a totalitarian *lieux de memoir* – the bourgeois one –, which implied the silencing of the funerary rites of the majority of the population. This forced silence, totally in line with what went on at the other vertices of the “Lusophone Atlantic” (Lisbon and Rio de Janeiro) was even more violent, in symbolical and physical terms, in Angola, where it implied the forceful prohibition of the local customs at the controlled urban areas.

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