

ANGOLAN SLAVE TRADE IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. THE ATLANTIC NETWORKS OF RODRIGO DA COSTA DE ALMEIDA

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Since the earliest days of the overseas Atlantic expansion the Portuguese Crown had sought to have exclusive control over the sources and goods of the new territories discovered, and that remained its aim during pre-colonial times. In the case of Africa in the early fifteenth century, the Crown (and his own family) granted Prince Henry the Navigator various commercial monopolies on certain products in Portugal itself, as well as on trade in West Africa and the Atlantic islands¹. After Henry's death, and under John II, the monopoly on West African trade was restructured and restored to the Crown, specifically for the most profitable products of gold and slaves². In West Central Africa, Paulo Dias de Novais was appointed the first captain and governor of Angola and given the task of exploring the coast and the hinterland. After his death, the Crown took direct control of this territory and appointed a series of temporary governors and captains to rule the region and its peoples, as well as to secure the Crown's monopoly³.

As Cátia Antunes has shown, royal monopolies were founded in personal bonds to the king in a system of reward for services and favors provided by individuals to the Crown. In granting these men positions overseas, the Crown simultaneously appointed the representatives of its intentions and rights in those territories. This was a way of sharing the costs

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¹ West Africa corresponds to the area covered by today's Senegal and Nigeria.

² BOXER, 1969: 309.

³ West Central Africa corresponds to the area covered by modern Gabon, Congo and Angola. BIRMINGHAM, 1965: 9-20.

so as to be able to focus on gaining revenues. In order to maximize the latter, the Crown pushed colonies of settlement to exercise fiercer territorial control, invested in colonial governments and granted monopolies on trade so as to secure administrative and economic leadership⁴. Supporting the Church and missionary work were also part of this monopoly endeavor, the aim of which was to ensure the submission and integration of Africans into the Portuguese colonial way of thought.

Although this, of course, was the purpose and principal idea of the Portuguese Crown, officials sent to Angola and supposed to be the personification of the king's interests were in reality far keener on satisfying their own ambitions than on complying with royal rules. Indeed, in order to better secure these ambitions, officials bonded together to create local networks, specifically relating to the slave trade and using the profits from this trade to cover the risk taken in accepting the overseas tasks⁵. The high mortality rate among officials was well-known and an important reason for seeking to avoid being sent to Angola since every letter from the authorities in S. Paulo de Luanda demanded more soldiers to replace those who had died.

These local networks were generally put in place by people who were social outsiders, such as Romani, New Christians or exiled criminals (*degredados*). However, they were also complemented with Crown agents. Whatever their background, all these agents could be or become what Alencastro called «colonial men», meaning people serving the Crown at various places overseas, but all investing in a specific place with the aim of gaining wealth and prestige and, ultimately, social promotion for themselves⁶. Although these networks were local and specific to places such as Angola, they were also connected to networks in various parts of Brazil (including Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Pernambuco) and even within West Central Africa (Loango).

When considering these chains of economic interest, scholars have largely neglected the important role played by social outsiders as the organizers and agents of trade networks in places such as Angola and have instead focused on those appointed by the Crown to run these overseas territories. Scholars including Nuno Monteiro, Fernanda Bicalho and Fátima Gouvêa have emphasized the leadership by the nobles appointed as governors of Bahia, Rio de Janeiro and Angola, and the connections between these noblemen within networks apparently under their control, while other academics, such as João Fragoso and Selma Pantoja, have concentrated on the internal networks put in place in Angola and Brazil by local individuals, specifically those regarded as the local nobility (*nobreza da terra*), but without seeking to connect these networks beyond their coastal boundaries⁷.

⁴ ANTUNES, 2012: 173-185.

⁵ GUARDA, 2013.

⁶ ALENCASTRO, 2000: 103-104.

⁷ FRAGOSO *et al.*, 2010; MONTEIRO *et al.*, 2005; FRAGOSO & GOUVÊA, 2010; PANTOJA, 2010: 237-242.

What is missing is a study linking these two perspectives. Indeed, the «government networks», as referred to by Gouvêa, need to be contextualized as it is otherwise hard to understand how a governor recently arrived in Angola was able immediately to develop his links to Brazil «out of the blue». Moreover, it is hardly conceivable that the local nobility in a place such as Luanda would remain outside the Atlantic profits chain when even African kingdoms such as Matamba and Cassange were keen to participate⁸. We need, therefore, to follow David Hancock and to explore the marginal and opportunistic men who developed those webs at a regional level and then extended them across the Atlantic. This aspect has still to be researched for Portugal, Brazil and Angola, and it is this gap that is addressed in this article. The key focus here is on analyzing the regional networks put in place by men on the spot, such as Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida, and on understanding the importance of such middlemen in linking the Atlantic through a series of networks covering the African slave trade and eluding the Crown's monopoly. I will start by introducing the slave trading networks in the Angolan hinterland and the networks of power surrounding Governor Bernardino de Távora de Sousa Tavares in Luanda (namely his connection with Almeida), while also examining the conflict that emerged from the rivalry between the governor's network and that of his opponents (the royal purveyor, the captain of the Cavalry and the secretary of Angola). Lastly I will demonstrate how and why Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida built connections across the Atlantic, and the social and economic impact that this had on him and his family.

Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida was the valet of Governor Bernardino de Távora de Sousa Tavares and in charge of an Angolan group responsible for securing the governor's interests in acquiring slaves from the hinterland and keeping his rivals in Luanda out of this trade. He was also a useful middleman in the slave trade between Angola and Bahia, thus creating a link between the governor and the latter's son, Alexandre de Sousa Freire, who led a garrison of soldiers in Bahia. This chapter sees social outsiders, for the first time, as the main figures on the stage of the Atlantic slave trade, and thus as playing a key role in these activities. Historiography has traditionally attributed this role to characters of social importance, whereas the latter profited from these networks, but did not actually put them in place. This new scope is made possible by a deeper analysis of the organization of African slave trade and the linkages identified, also for the first time, between local commercial networks and the Atlantic.

Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida's roots remain obscure. His grandson, who inherited his name, inquired into his family background when applying for the habit of the Order of Christ, but sought in vain for confirmation of his grandfather's purity of blood. Despite efforts undertaken in Lisbon, Faro, Luanda and Bahia to find out when Rodrigo was born and who his parents were, his origins remain unclear. A baptism register held at the church

⁸ BIRMINGHAM, 1965: 41.

of Faro and found by the Holy Office solicitor in 1754 reported that «On the thirtieth of August of 1654, I baptized Rodrigo, son of Domingos de Almeida and of his wife Anna Maria, stepfather Francisco Fugaça de Mello, present the midwife Graçia Luis». The baptism registration was signed by a priest and, one hundred years later, was accepted as genuine by the Holy Office, even though it was impossible to find anyone to properly corroborate this information⁹.

The fact that nobody knew who Rodrigo's parents were or could certify to the purity of his blood shows that his family could not have held a prominent position in society; this would have been the case if they had had noble blood or commercial wealth as this would have given them high social status and they would therefore have been well-known¹⁰. Consequently, we can assume that Rodrigo was not wealthy when he started his career in the Atlantic in July 1668, even though he had sufficient money to fund the costs of being a soldier in Bahia. He stayed there for fourteen months, where he loyally served Governor Alexandre de Souza Freire and, by the time he returned to Lisbon at the end of his posting, had been promoted to the rank of captain¹¹.

Here I open a parenthesis to emphasize that, despite some similarities to the cases presented in the *Optima Pars* project, Rodrigo's trajectory is a singular case. Contrary to what Flory and Smith, Schwartz, Kennedy and other authors state about the careers of local nobility for their case studies in that project¹², Rodrigo is unlikely to have been a merchant at the start of his career. He became part of Angola's militia and put a personal effort into fulfilling, and indeed going beyond, his obligations, as I will demonstrate. In doing so, he pleased and gained the trust of the governors. As a result, he was appointed to higher positions, thus integrating into the local nobility, and received the habit of the Order of Christ from the king in confirmation of his noble status. Nonetheless, I have not found any sources reporting his activities as a merchant before that time, even though his frequent voyages and the references to his ships, slaves, and horses going from Brazil to Angola mean this is certainly conceivable. In contrast to the above authors' case studies, Rodrigo did not develop any matrimonial alliances with people in the government of Angola or any port city in Brazil¹³. The same does not apply, however, to other institutions as the two daughters of his marriage to D. Ana Duque married a colonel and a Bachelor, thus confirming one of the patterns revealed by the authors of *Optima Pars*. With regard to

⁹ ANTT, TSO, Habilitações, Rodrigo, mç. 4, doc. 62.

¹⁰ Rodrigo was said to be the son of Domingos de Almeida, from Grandola, and of his wife D. Ana Maria de Lima, from S. Miguel de Alfama, in Lisbon. He was reported to be the grandson of Ruy Dias Santos and of Beatriz Vaz, both from Grandola, and of Amador Rodolfo and Isabel de Araújo, both from Lisbon. Although the names of his parents were corroborated by a note in the baptism register, meaning that they were his real parents, it is strange that nobody in any of the places Rodrigo lived in had ever met them. ANTT, TSO, Habilitações, Rodrigo, mç. 4, doc. 62.

¹¹ ANTT, RGM, D. Pedro II, Book 11, fl.383.

¹² BICALHO, 2005: 83-87.

¹³ BICALHO, 2005: 86.

this project, Maria de Fátima Gouvêa nevertheless stressed the importance of the «imperial connections» built by imperial elites (i.e. bonds between governors at different points of the South Atlantic), an argument shared by Maria Fernanda Bicalho and João Fragoso¹⁴. This is the key differentiating factor between the careers presented in the above project and the career of Rodrigo, with the latter seeming to have benefited from governors' protection in return for serving them to the best of his ability rather than benefiting from any links they may have had between Africa and South America. By then, there were ships, men, and horses, circulating around the Atlantic, and these are reported as being his. It was thus Rodrigo's wealth that enabled successive governors to establish their trading links, and not the other way around, as argued by the above authors. Over time, Rodrigo increased his revenues and became a wealthy merchant, by which time many governors had benefited from the trade networks that he had built up. The idea of trade networks put in place by governors and wealthy merchants bonded by marital alliances consequently does not fit with Rodrigo's trajectory.

In 1676 Rodrigo left Lisbon to join the new governor of Angola, Aires de Saldanha e Meneses, and to serve him in that colony as lieutenant of the Cavalry. This was still part of his first period in the Atlantic. He was active in the South Atlantic until 1687, with activities extending from the West Central African coast to the shores of Brazil. Rodrigo's endeavor was characterized by his pleasing, by all means, the governors on both sides of the Atlantic. However, his success started before he reached Angola, where the new governor appointed him captain of the cavalry, a position he took very much to heart. It is unclear when exactly Rodrigo started to have some money of his own, although the period he spent in Bahia may have proved profitable and enabled him to purchase his own lands and slaves in Angola. Whether those possessions were bought or received as payment for services performed is unknown, although they probably resulted from his involvement in the local slave trade, where after receiving some slaves from *sobas* he was able to accumulate a sum of money that was convertible into land that he could put to good use¹⁵. One of the things he was noted for during his time as a lieutenant and captain was the use of his personal wealth to take care of the horses, which were fed with grass from Rodrigo's lands¹⁶. He must also have had a certain degree of mobility since he was soon able to go to Maranhão, from where, with the governor's agreement, he was able to reach Pernambuco. It was during his stay in Pernambuco that war broke out in Angola and the governor of this captaincy dispatched him to Angola as a captain in charge of twelve soldiers. After this mission had been completed, Rodrigo undertook a further trip to Angola and, once again with the Bahia authorities' permission, took three exiled men with him.

¹⁴ BICALHO, 2005: 87-90.

¹⁵ As Mariana Candido shows, anyone could have slaves simply by using violence against the *sobas* to extract payment of tributes and presents in the form of captives. CANDIDO, 2013: 185-188.

¹⁶ ANTT, RGM, D. Pedro II, Book 11, fl.383.

Between 1681 and 1687, therefore, he regularly crossed the Atlantic, taking soldiers from Brazil to Angola to assist successive governors in times of war. During this period his activities were not funded by royal revenues and were conducted entirely at his own expense. As surprising as this situation might be for a poor young man who had only recently started his career overseas, the sources merely certify that this was the case without, however, specifying the actual costs involved. It is left entirely up to us to imagine how this could have been possible, and this leads us to suppose that he already had businesses in Pernambuco, probably involving the Governor of Bahia and related to the slave trade. This is because the sources reveal that he was involved in the Angolan slave trade a few years later and also during the governorship in Bahia of Alexandre de Souza Freire's brother, who seemed to be really pleased with Rodrigo. Furthermore, Rodrigo's will disclosed that he had businesses in Pernambuco and other parts of Brazil, and these could have been started at that time¹⁷. As a result of this heavy personal involvement in the South Atlantic crossings, along with his being appointed to represent the Senate of Luanda, a *pro bono* appointment made in Lisbon, the Crown decided to grant him the sum of 200 réis and membership of the Order of Santiago¹⁸. These rewards were the corollary for his dedication to the tasks for which he had been appointed and were awarded when Rodrigo was still establishing himself in the Portuguese Empire.

After these awards were bestowed upon him by the Crown, the first mentions of Rodrigo's personal wealth start appearing in the sources, thus reflecting the link between the two Atlantic shores. Instead, however, of relying on the grant of 200 réis, Rodrigo started working even harder by serving the governor as captain-major in the province of Libolo, lieutenant in the artillery, and director of the Holy House of Mercy of Luanda. In each of these positions, Rodrigo continued to employ his own ships to transport guns to the forts in Angola, as well as soldiers from Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro and Bahia¹⁹. At the same time, he offered three of the four horses he had bought in Pernambuco to the Angolan cavalry, possibly in order to be regarded as a benefactor not only for his own office, but also for the Kingdom of Angola itself and the interests of the King of Portugal. He also employed his own slaves to help Gonçalo de Menezes in the war against the African chief Mbwíla, and later on to assist Henrique Jacques de Magalhães. None of these activities produced income and all of them were conducted at his own expense, while he also donated 4000

¹⁷ AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D. 2189.

¹⁸ A title linked to the Order of Santiago, one of the three created during the time of the Iberian *Reconquista*, the other two being the Order of Avis and the Order of Christ. The end of the *Reconquista* and the absorption of the orders by the Crown progressively made these orders and their knights symbols of prestige, granted by the Crown as payment for services performed. Traditionally connected to knights, and thus the nobility, being appointed a knight in one of these orders represented a rise in social status and also a sum of money. The most important of these three orders in terms of the status of nobility was the Order of Christ (OLIVAL, 1997: 97-108).

¹⁹ These ships appear to have been his, even if the sources do not reveal where or how he obtained them. Nonetheless, the witnesses interviewed by the Inquisition said he owned many ships, while another document indicates that the journeys between Angola and Brazil were made in Rodrigo's own vessels. ANTT, RGM, D. Pedro II, Book 11, fl.383; AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D. 2189.

cruzados for the Holy House of Mercy of Luanda and up to 12000 cruzados to restore the institution's hospital. These were yet more examples of the great generosity and care for the colony that Rodrigo displayed in seeking to protect the institutions established there by the Crown, a noble gesture by someone who, as I will shortly demonstrate, dreamed of becoming a nobleman.

Rodrigo's donations may seem large, but by the late 1680s he had become a very wealthy and powerful man, owning ships, slaves and lands on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, the existence of his ships can only be explained if we consider them to have been needed for his personal businesses. Having said this, we can nevertheless regard Rodrigo as having been a poor young man who spent more than a decade traveling back and forth between Angola and Pernambuco, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro. On both sides of the Atlantic he served governors who did their utmost to grant him royal favors because they had benefited from the use of men, slaves, horses, ships and money from Rodrigo and were grateful for all this help. The governors had probably also benefited from his contacts in each of the above places and the connections between them with regard to the slave trade, given that they seemed to support his voyages to Brazil. This was a time when demand for slaves in the Americas was growing rapidly, while we have also already seen how easy it was to own slaves in Angola. Moreover, Rodrigo was ideally placed to engage in the slave trade, as his frequent voyages and his will indicate that he had contacts in each of the places he traveled to. The revenues from this trade would have created a cycle of increasing personal wealth, whereby the more money he made from the slave trade through the networks he had established, the more money he could spend on working for the king and in reaping the expected benefits. And indeed, the generosity revealed by Rodrigo, in every sense comparable to the behavior expected of a nobleman, was recognized in 1698 when the Crown awarded him membership of the Order of Christ, the only order conferring nobility on its members, along with the corresponding allowance (*tença*)²⁰.

The end of the seventeenth century brought with it evidence of Rodrigo's real aims and ambitions. After being appointed a knight of the Order of Christ, Rodrigo tried to acquire the concession on the property of the Purveyor's Office of the Royal Treasury (*Provedor da Fazenda Real*) from the Crown for seven thousand cruzados. In order to convince the king of his merits, Rodrigo explained how he had several times funded supplies to the governors in Angola and Brazil from his own income, both in times of war and peace. At the same time, he demonstrated his local influence by emphasizing that when Henrique Jacques de Magalhães tried to impose the copper coin in Angola, Rodrigo and his friends and relatives were the only people who had been able to put an end to the local rebellion triggered by the coins. Moreover, his prominence was such that Magalhães had proposed him for the requested office because he recognized him as the best person for the designated task. It

²⁰ ANTT, RGM, D. Pedro II, Book 11, fl. 383.

was only natural, therefore, that he sought to acquire the property of the Purveyor's Office so as to continue the good work done and with the hope of transferring its benefits to his heirs²¹. However, the Overseas Council was of the opinion that Rodrigo should not obtain that office as, despite his deserving it on the grounds of his previous work, there were no guarantees about the skills and honesty of his sons and grandsons²². Rodrigo nevertheless managed in December 1701 to purchase the office of clerk (*escrivão*) of the Royal Treasury of Angola, thus reflecting the entrepreneurship that he demonstrated during Bernardino de Távora's governorship in Angola and throughout the rest of his life.

Bernardino de Távora was already elderly when he arrived as governor in Angola in December 1701. Based on their existing friendship and despite ruling for just one year, Bernardino succeeded in increasing Rodrigo's local influence and power by making him his valet, while also improving Rodrigo's position in Brazil. Although it is impossible to know exactly when the friendship between Rodrigo and Bernardino began, their mutual enemy, Gaspar da Silva Reis, stated that by the time Távora's predecessor was coming to the end of his term in office, Rodrigo was announcing to anyone who wanted to hear that the new ruler was his friend²³. In addition, Rodrigo's first job in the Atlantic had been in Bahia at the service of Bernardino de Távora's brother, the governor Alexandre de Sousa Freire, and he returned to Bahia several times during 1702. By then, however, the person he was in contact with in Bahia was the other Alexandre de Sousa Freire, the nephew of the Bahia governor and son of Bernardino de Távora.

Given that Rodrigo was linked to that family from early on in his career until his death, the assumption made by Silva Reis must have been accurate. Indeed, the link between the two families continued over the generations since the sugar mills and the office of Purveyor of the Customs House of Bahia (*Provedor da Alfândega da Bahia*), both of which were acquired from Sousa Freire, were bequeathed to Rodrigo's eldest son Domingos.

The year 1702 was a remarkable year for Rodrigo. About a month after taking charge as Governor of Angola, Bernardino de Távora appointed Manuel Monteiro da Rocha, the godfather of one of Rodrigo's sons, as Prosecutor of the Royal Treasury²⁴, the institution at which Rodrigo was a clerk. This reflected Bernardino's concern to have Rodrigo's people within that body in order effectively to control it. I specifically refer to Bernardino's con-

²¹ AHU, Angola, Cx. 16, D. 1812.

²² AHU, Angola, Cx. 16, D. 1812.

²³ AHU, Angola, Cx. 19, D. 1978.

²⁴ The Council of Trent reinforced the importance of baptism within the spirit of the Counter-Reformation. In this context, an individual was incorporated into the Church through the spiritual tutors, with baptism representing the spiritual birth. As such, links of solidarity resulted from the relationship of godparents to godchildren. The godparents were integrated within the family and also considered to be relatives, with marriages between such parties being regarded as incestuous and forbidden by the Church. Such a relationship thus spread to the social life of these individuals, reinforcing social relations previously existent or creating others. It could also link people belonging to different social levels, establishing between them vertical relations of power. This privileged relationship, so typical in the Catholic estates, was also expressed through economic cooperation in the form of exchanges of goods and services and through political loyalty in the form of alliances or domination. NACIF, 2013.

cern and not Rodrigo's as although this governor has been portrayed as a weak administrator and a puppet in the hands of his friends, this depiction would seem to be far from accurate. It is simply not conceivable that a seventy-two-year-old man would have gone to Angola just to attend to the wishes of his friends, while risking his own life in the tropics²⁵. Only an ambitious and self-confident person would accept that responsibility and risk in return for the opportunity to increase his own wealth, while also maintaining his social position (the marriage of his eldest son meant he had become linked to the House of the Counts of Aveiras)²⁶. Although it was obviously important to have local contacts upon arrival, that need was safeguarded by the presence of Rodrigo and his social connections, as will now be explained.

By then, Rodrigo was an influential man in Angola, while having friends and relatives working with him meant he was better able to respond to the needs and wishes of the governors. By the time of Magalhães' policy on copper coins, Rodrigo had been able to restore social peace, while his position as head of the Holy House of Mercy of Luanda and membership of that institution's brotherhood enabled him to control elections for the Senate of Luanda, thus ensuring that the new judges were under his command. Meanwhile his son Domingos was captain of infantry, thus controlling the local militia. Therefore, almost every public institution that was part of daily life in Luanda was under Rodrigo's influence. This included religious life, where not only was he a brother of Luanda's Holy House of Mercy, but he also enjoyed good relations with the Jesuits through their connections with Bernardino de Távora²⁷.

Bernardino was able to take advantage of Rodrigo's importance in Luanda and the networks the latter established. In this way, he was able to benefit from his time as administrator of the colony by becoming actively involved in the local slave trade, with the result that he appeared to be responsible for disrupting the slave trade and for organizing the networks that enabled that trade. Among his many roles, the governor was expected to guarantee procedural order in relations with the populations of the hinterland, to mediate in relationships with various institutions in Luanda and to oversee the port activities regarding exports of slaves to America and Europe. Hence his power was founded on his network relationships with the hinterlands, the town's institutions and the port administration. And in all these relationships he was reliant on his friendship with Rodrigo da Costa de

²⁵ GUARDA, 2013: 65-66.

²⁶ There is a disparity between the sources regarding his age. According to the witnesses interviewed by the Inquisition when he applied for the habit of the Order of Christ, he was 72 years old. However, according to the Royal Purveyor, Gaspar da Silva Reis, he was 85, with that age being the reason for the measures taken and felt by Reis to be unreasonable. Even if his exact birth date is uncertain, one always has to consider the possibility that Bernardino's enemies wished to discredit him. It would also seem highly unlikely that a person aged 85 would be considered eligible to be nominated by the king and to travel to Angola and continue living there for three years. Given that the information produced by the inquiries it seems more reasonable, to consider that he was born c. 1629. AHU, Angola, Cx.17, D. 1930; A.N.T.T., TSO, CG, Habilitações, Bernardino, mç.1, doc.3.

²⁷ GUARDA, 2013: 51-52.

Almeida, the *de facto* manager of the local slave trade operations. It was Rodrigo's men who were responsible for disrupting slave markets (*pumbos*) in the hinterland²⁸. Most of these men were social outcasts (Romani, New Christians or *degradados*) who had enlisted in the local army and were ready to follow Rodrigo, and hence the governor, if the latter had the support of the former²⁹. Rodrigo ensured Bernardino obtained a share of the slaves available for trading by linking the hinterland chiefdoms with the coastal markets through his military supporters, who acted as middlemen in bringing the slaves from the *presídios* (the forts in Angola's hinterland) to Luanda. This share was the result of the labors of merchants who were sent into the hinterlands, where they used the title of captain-major bestowed upon them by the governor in order to endow them with the authority and right to deal with «vassal» African chiefdoms³⁰. After their official appointment, these merchants went inland with their merchandizes, using violent means to force African chiefs to secure transport for them without payment, while also demanding that the African chiefs supplied them with food «which they made them give against their will»³¹.

These forced «gifts» (*baculamentos*) had been abolished by the 1676 *Regimento* (body of law), according to which governors were not allowed to demand such contributions from the local chiefs. Despite this prohibition, however, the merchants who had been made captain-majors continued this long-standing tradition of «gifts». This illegal practice also continued to be accompanied by forcing chiefs to accept the commodities provided by the merchants in exchange for slaves. This «gift giving» and bartering were further aggravated by the captain-majors' power to act as intermediaries in resolving conflicts between chiefdoms, for which they demanded substantial payments (in the form of slaves) and where the captain-majors had an interest in ruling in favor of the party that would pay them the most (again, the highest number of slaves).

The actions of these captain-majors profoundly disrupted the trading principles and traditions of the hinterland, especially regarding the function of the African middlemen (*pumbeiros*) responsible for establishing the commercial links between African rulers, Europeans and Angolan settlers.³² This was because once these captain-majors arrived in the *presídios* to which they had been appointed, they distributed the cloth (*fazendas*) they had brought with them as *banzos* (bundles of goods used as a unit of purchase for slaves),

²⁸ *Pumbo*: The market of Pumbo (later Stanley Pool) was located in Loango. Sixteenth-century Africans called the Portuguese merchants who went to trade there *pumbeiros*. This name soon became applied to any Portuguese agents going to inland markets (*feira*) to trade, while the markets themselves began to be called *pumbos*. HENRIQUES, 1997:116-117, 766.

²⁹ *Degradados* were people who had been punished by being sent to Portuguese colonies, where they were expected to contribute to the colony's protection and prosperity. AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1930.

³⁰ Although some academics as Beatrix HEINTZE (1980) and Catarina M. SANTOS (2005) consider the African chiefdoms within Portuguese rule as vassals, as the documentation represented them, I defended in my dissertation that it was not the case (GUARDA, 2013) and the same is argued by CANDIDO, 2013: 93.

³¹ AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1923, 27 January 1703.

³² AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1923, 27 January 1703.

forcing the African chiefs to give them a slave (*peça de índias*) in return for each *banzo*. If the chiefs, or *sobas*, had insufficient numbers of slaves to pay for the *banzos*, their relatives could be taken away to supplement the payment³³. Although this situation was relatively common among African communities in Angola – obtaining credit by pawning a relative to the creditor until the debt was repaid – relatives were unlikely to regain their freedom once they had been given to Portuguese officers³⁴. The fact that these «exchanges» circumvented the markets and were conducted directly by the merchants themselves caused the *pumbos* to stagnate, while the *pumbeiros* were unable to use their commodities to buy many slaves since most of the best ones had already been taken by the captain-majors³⁵. The latter also acted as judges at the *mucanos*, the courts where the disputes of *sobas* were resolved, and in doing so commonly favored the party that would be most profitable for them. As a result, there was no place for the *pumbeiros* to trade since all the slaves available in the chiefdoms, or *sobados*, ended up being forcibly taken by these captain-majors in a true monopoly that led to frequent complaints by local residents (*moradores*). The captain-majors were controlled by Rodrigo's men, who were in charge of the Luanda militia (in which Rodrigo's son served) and who were also the bodyguards of Bernardino de Távora in Luanda. This militia was responsible for traveling to the various forts to extract the slaves owed to the governor, Rodrigo and themselves and to take them directly to the coast.

The journey to the hinterland was paid for by a percentage of the slaves acquired. In reality, these activities were based on a hierarchy of power and violence, starting with the asymmetric trading between traders and chiefdoms. The same asymmetry was also ingrained within the relationship between the merchants and the militia at the governor's service, while similar dynamics were at play in the relationships between the militia and its leader, Rodrigo, and the latter and the governor himself. In this system, profits from the slave trade were concomitant with the position held by each actor in the hierarchy. And this system worked, as shown by the case of José de São Miguel Pereira. The latter was appointed by Bernardino as captain-major for the lands of the *soba* Mbwíla. This was after Pereira had received thirty *banzos* on credit from António de Mariz Sarmento (one of Rodrigo's hand men at the service of Bernardino and who became a member of the ruling Senate of Luanda after Bernardino's death, owing to the influence that he enjoyed as a *protégé* of Rodrigo during Bernardino's governorship) to exchange for slaves. This was the best way to ensure that Pereira would be able to pay for the *banzos*. If anything happened in the meantime to the *banzos* credited to Pereira, the slaves of his wife and sons would be taken. After Pereira died on his way to Mbwíla, the governor sent sixteen soldiers and a colonel to the Dande district to collect the slaves that Pereira had promised as collateral for the *banzos*

³³ AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1923, 27 January 1703.

³⁴ SHUMWAY, 2011: 59.

³⁵ AHU, Angola, Cx. 17, D. 1911.

granted on credit. The soldiers took the slaves and also the *banzos*³⁶. This case study clearly shows that if a trader appointed as a captain-major by the governor failed in his mission, a militia would be sent to retrieve the governor's investment. Other names, too, should be mentioned in order to complete the picture. According to Gaspar da Silva Reis, the purveyor and the governor's enemy, the governor appointed António Lobato Torres as judge of all the *mucanos*, while this task was supposed, in theory, to be done by the captain-major in each respective jurisdiction. This suggests that Bernardino did not trust the merchants he had appointed as captain-majors and was afraid that, when judging the *mucanos*, they would take all the profits for themselves. In order to avoid this, Torres was appointed to keep a close eye on each trial to ensure that the governor's share was secured. Bernardino also appointed another man, Manuel Fernandes Sardinha, as the agent of his ships and in charge of taking fifty to seventy armed men to calm down the uprisings of the *sobas* that were triggered by the captain-majors' oppression of the *presídios*. According to Silva Reis, however, Sardinha and his men went to the *presídios* and bullied the captain-majors by threatening to denounce their extortions from the *sobas* unless they gave them a share of the slaves in the form of *baculamentos* (gifts from the *sobas*) or through the *mucanos*³⁷. This just increased the pressure on the African chiefs, who not only had to take account of the ambitions of the captain-majors who supervised them, but also of these «policemen» (given that it was highly probable that some of the slaves taken as the governor's share would have been the armed men's own share). This affirms the hierarchy existing at a social, political and military level in Angola, with each stage of this interdependent network linked to one another through bonds corresponding to favors and obligations that made each social level subordinate to the governor and his valets, specifically Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida³⁸. These dynamics explain the extent to which standing law and rules of trade were violated, as well as the consequent disruption of commerce.

Once back in Luanda, Rodrigo's militia was crucial in ensuring the governor's primacy in the export of slaves to Brazil by loading ships with more captives than allowed by the Portuguese Crown and stealing manioc flour from locals to use as a means of exchange for buying more slaves in Benguela and for feeding existing captives during the transatlantic voyage³⁹. The primacy of the governor's exports was secured by blocking the intervention of administrative officials, such as Gaspar da Silva Reis, Pascoal da Silva Pontes and Amaro Barbosa Brandão, who could have threatened Bernardino de Távora's interests. These three men joined forces against the governor during much of his time in office in an attempt to promote their interests rather than his. In July 1702, all three men were jailed by men loyal to the governor and led by Rodrigo de Almeida, with the implicit sup-

³⁶ AHU, Angola, Cx.18, D. 1930.

³⁷ AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1930.

³⁸ AHU, Angola, Cx. 19, D. 1979, 7 July 1703.

³⁹ AHU, Angola, Cx.18, D. 1930.

port of Manuel Simões Colaço. The offices previously held by Silva Reis were then divided between Rodrigo, who was appointed *Provedor da Fazenda Real*, and Colaço, who was appointed *Ouvidor-Geral*. This meant that Rodrigo had finally achieved the office that he had coveted so much and that, from then on, he was able to run the Royal Treasury, both for the governor's and his own benefit. Finally, with Colaço as *Ouvidor-Geral* and their mutual enemies in jail, trade was now completely controlled by the network of Rodrigo and Governor Bernardino.

The death of Governor Bernardino in December 1702 brought an end to his benefits from the Angolan slave trade; the same did not apply, however, to his men. Although Colaço soon distanced himself from the governor, arguing that he had been forced by Bernardino to collaborate, the majority were able to retain their power by ensuring they remained within Rodrigo's sphere of influence⁴⁰. Colaço's fear shows his secondary role as a valet; this contrasts with Rodrigo, who continued signing documents as Purveyor of the Royal Treasury and retained his influence over Luanda's institutions, even to the extent of controlling the election of the Senate members who ruled until a new governor was appointed⁴¹.

Rodrigo's strong position was not limited, however, to Angola as his networks also extended to Bahia, where the youngest son of Bernardino de Távora was an army colonel. While Bernardino was still alive, he and his son were in regular contact in order to protect their interests on both sides of the Atlantic, relying in this respect on the ships, men and loyalty of Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida. The fact that the links between the son and Rodrigo continued after Bernardino's death made it possible for Rodrigo's networks in Bahia to be made available there. This argument is supported by the fact that Rodrigo had agents all over the Atlantic territories, while also maintaining ownership of at least one sugar mill in Brazil⁴². It is unclear how many sugar mills he owned, although his will mentions the Jacaracanga mill bought from Alexandre de Souza Freire in Bahia. This was supposed to be developed into an enormous property since its revenues were intended to be used, according to Rodrigo's will, for expansion through purchases of more adjoining land. This concern reflects the tradition among the nobility of seeking to keep all the family's possession together by passing them in their entirety from father to son as a single legacy. Rodrigo was keen to preserve his wealth in a trust set up for his son and grandson, with the aim of creating a property of significant size and with a high demand for slave labor. This was probably the reason for his involvement at the head of the Angolan slave trade networks and accounts for much of the money he invested in various Brazilian ports, as

⁴⁰ AHU, Angola, Cx. 18, D. 1954.

⁴¹ AHU, Angola, Cx. 19, D. 1978.

⁴² AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D. 2189.

well as Lisbon and Angola. The Angolan slave trade enabled Rodrigo to amalgamate his influence and wealth, with businesses all over the South Atlantic⁴³.

Bernardino de Távora's governorship was characterized mainly by his involvement in commercial disruptions to the inland slave trade and conflicts with local authorities, whose interests in the local slave trade had been overruled by the governor and his men. This resulted in intense activity among traders and merchants connected with captain-majors and ship owners on a scale never previously seen, with the entirety of Bernardino's activities as governor being oriented towards generating profit from trade. As confirmation of the lure of money was the fact that Rodrigo traveled as supercargo to supervise the exchanges between Angola and Brazil and to secure his own interests along with those of Bernardino. The link between the two men was further reinforced by Rodrigo's above-mentioned purchase of the Jacaracanga sugar mill (which became the family property) and the office of Purveyor of the Treasury in Bahia from Sousa Freire. Indeed, these connections lasted throughout Rodrigo's professional life as he had started his career by serving the brother of Bernardino who was then Governor of Brazil, and then served Bernardino himself in Angola and lastly, after the latter's death, continued to trade with Bernardino's son, Alexandre de Sousa Freire. The fact that the two families were connected to one another by more than mere commercial ties is indicated by the marriage of one of Alexandre de Sousa Freire's sons, António José de Sousa Freire, to a daughter of Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida, D. Brites da Costa (widow of Manuel Pereira da Silva Caldas)⁴⁴.

Rodrigo and Bernardino's friendship was still perceived after the latter's death, when, in 1703, the Crown appointed the new *Ouvidor-Geral*, Rodrigo Rebelo da Silva, to serve in Angola. The latter was related to Rodrigo's wife and reported to be engaged to marry Rodrigo's daughter, with Silva Reis referring with great displeasure to the frequent visits of the new officer to Rodrigo's house⁴⁵. This displeasure was increased by Rebelo da Silva's failure to respond to the instructions from the Crown to confiscate Bernardino's possessions. Silva Reis expected to be compensated for the losses he had suffered as a result of his imprisonment, but instead of confiscating the governor's possessions and giving them to Silva Reis, Rebelo da Silva left them in the care of Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida, who immediately sent them to Bernardino de Távora's family in Brazil. Once in the hands of Alexandre de Sousa Freire and his elder brother, Manuel de Sousa Tavares, those goods were too far away to be used by the brothers' enemies as compensation for losses suffered. On the contrary, Bernardino's heirs used them to further improve their social status, which had already been enriched by matrimonial alliances with important families such as the Brito e Castro in Bahia and the Counts of Aveiras in Portugal⁴⁶.

⁴³ AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D.2189; ANTT, TSO, Habilitações, Rodrigo, mc. 4, doc. 62.

⁴⁴ HENRIQUES & HENRIQUES, 2006: 509.

⁴⁵ AHU, Angola, Cx. 19, D. 1978.

⁴⁶ For more information on the sons of Bernardino de Távora, see GUARDA, 2013.

Meanwhile, Rodrigo continued increasing his power in Angola, where he maintained his influence, and also in Brazil, where he succeeded Alexandre de Sousa Freire as Purveyor of the Royal Treasury in Bahia and managed some of the latter's sugar mills and plantations. After Rodrigo's death in 1717, and as stated in his will, his son Domingos da Costa de Almeida took over that office and, as the new head of the family, received the sum of 34,179,596 réis. By the time of his death, Rodrigo was one of the most powerful, influential and wealthy men in Bahia, famous for his entrepreneurial skills, properties and ships, and treated with the respect and deference considered due to someone of his caliber⁴⁷. Other factors that contributed to the rise in his social status were the important connections he had established through the marriage of his son Domingos to D. Brites da Rocha Pitta, daughter of Sebastião da Rocha Pitta, a nobleman of the Royal House of Portugal. Pitta was renowned for his noble way of life, as well as for being a wealthy owner of sugar mills. This favorable marriage resulted in Domingos being favored by his father, who added a codicil to his will, leaving the above assets to Domingos⁴⁸.

Although he started his career as a soldier in Bahia, Rodrigo was a resilient and intelligent man who employed his skills to please his powerful superiors and, in so doing, improved his standing in society. He was bestowed with honors and offices, both by his superiors and by the Crown, with his power and influence increasing in direct proportion to his proximity to the nobles he served in Angola and Brazil. For their part, these noblemen benefited from Rodrigo's local knowledge and networks, finding in their connections across the Atlantic the key to making the South Atlantic slave trade a profitable and efficient enterprise.

In conclusion, even if the roots of Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida remain unclear, his wealth and noble way of life are well documented. Many people made mention of him as the master of many ships and owner of great amounts of money from his businesses in Bahia and Angola, as well as for holding honorable positions in the army and local institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. His will attests not only to his prosperity in the shape of the huge legacies left to his heirs, servants and various institutions, but also to his spread of businesses across the Atlantic through his representatives in Portugal, Luanda and Bahia⁴⁹. His wealth allowed Rodrigo and his family to enjoy the magnificence and ostentation of life as a noble family, receiving the respect and consideration afforded to such people and able to make profitable alliances. The marriage between Domingos da Costa de Almeida and

⁴⁷ ANTT, TSO, Habilitações, Rodrigo, mç. 4, doc. 62.

⁴⁸ «I declare that for the love I have for my son the Colonel Domingos da Costa de Almeida and for having married him to my pleasure and with succession I gave him the sums of money declared in a bill written with the letter of the mentioned son and signed by us both and the mill that I have in Jacaracanga, which I bought from Alexandre de Sousa Freire, which is also declared in the aforementioned bill which in everything mounts up to thirty four hundred and one hundred and seventy-nine thousand five hundred and ninety-six réis [...]» AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D. 2189.

⁴⁹ AHU, Angola, Cx. 21, D. 2189.

D. Brites da Rocha Pitta, daughter of the noble Sebastião da Rocha Pitta and D. Ana Cavalcante de Albuquerque, both from Bahia and owners of large sugar mills, constituted the greatest confirmation that all the efforts of Rodrigo da Costa de Almeida had paid off. Not only had his Atlantic networks secured the trade, transport and employment of African workers for Brazilian sugar plantations and mills, but they had also made his family one of the most powerful and influential in early eighteenth-century Bahia.

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