Rivalry on the Loango Coast: A Re-examination of the Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade

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Few historians working in the Dutch language have devoted their attention to the role of the Netherlands in the Atlantic Slave Trade.[1] Similarly, within the extensive historiography on the Atlantic Slave trade available in

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[1] A. VanDantzig, Pieter C. Emmer, Victor Enthoven, Cornelis Christiaan Goslinga, Henk den Heijer, Adam Jones, and Wim Klooster are among the exceptions. Their contributions include but are not limited to the following: A. Van Dantzig, ed., *A Collection of Documents from the General State Archive at The Hague*. Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1968; Pieter C. Emmer, *The Dutch Slave Trade 1500-1850*. (trans. by Chris Emery) New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006; Victor Enthoven, "An Assessment of Dutch Transatlantic Commerce, 1585-1817," and idem, "Early Dutch Expansion in the Atlantic Region, 1585-1621," in Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven, eds., *Riches from Atlantic Commerce: Dutch Transatlantic Trade and Shipping, 1584-1817*. Lieden, Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 385-446 and 17-48, respectively; Cornelis Christiaan Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680-1791*. (Maria J.L. van Yperen, ed.) Assen, Netherland: Van Gorcum, 1985; idem, *Emancipatie en Emancipator: De Geschiedenis van de Slavernij op de Benendenwindse Eilanden en van het Werk der Bevrijding*. Nijmegen, Nederlands: Van Gorcum & Comp., 1956; idem, *A Short History of the Netherlands Antilles and Surinam*. The Hague; Boston: M. Nijhoff, 1979; Henk den Heijer, *De Geschieden van de WIC*. Zuphen, Nederland: Walburg Pers, 1994; idem, "The Dutch West India Company, 1621-1791" and idem, "The West African Trade of the Dutch West India Company, 1674-1740," in Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 77-114 and 139-170, respectively; Adam Jones, *West Africa in the Mid-Seventeenth Century: An Anonymous Dutch Manuscript*. Atlanta, GA: African Studies Association Press, 1995; Wim Klooster, "An Overview of Dutch Trade in the Americas, 1600-1800" and idem, "Curaçao and the Caribbean Transit Trade," in Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 365-384 and 203-218, respectively; idem, "Introduction: The Rise and Transformation of the Atlantic World," in Wim Klooster and Alfred Padula, eds., *The Atlantic World: Essays on Slavery, Migration, and Imagination*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Prentice Hall, 2005, pp. 1-42. Also, recent articles by David Richardson, Simon J. Hogerziel, Jelmer Vos, and David Eltis begin to explore the Dutch slave trade using new data from the Atlantic Slave Trade Database: Hogerzeil, Simon J. and David Richardson. "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortalitiy: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797." *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 2007), and Jelmer Vos, David Eltis and David Richardson. "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic." Forthcoming article.

English, relatively little scholarly interest has been shown on the role of the Dutch in the slave trade between the late 1500s and the early 1800s. In the 1950s, Charles R. Boxer began his investigation of the involvement of the Dutch in the slave trade but within a Europeanist perspective.[2] More recently, Johannes Postma has also explored the Dutch slave trade, but without giving adequate attention to the beginning segment of the middle passage: the journey to the slave ship.[3] With respect to the Gold Coast, Ray A. Kea made a monumental contribution.[4] However, although it does concentrate heavily on the Dutch in this particular landscape, it totally ignores the question of formation of ethnic identity within the slave trade. In the specific case of West Central Africa, on the other hand, historians of the slave trade such as John K. Thornton, Joseph C. Miller, and José C. Curto have primarily focused on the roles of the Portuguese in the commerce.[5] In 1966 David Birmingham challenged: "Another important area needing to be explored is the history of Loango, both in the pre-colonial period and during the eighteenth century when the French, English, and Dutch slave-trading activities were at their height."[6] Since that time, Phyllis M. Martin's 1972 book *The External Trade of the Lonago Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Comercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango* is the only significant work on the Loango Coast,

[2] Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Dutch in Brazil, 1621-1651*. Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String Press Inc., 1973; idem, *Salvador de Sá and the struggle for Brazil and Angola, 1602-1686*. London: University of London, 1952.

[3] Johannes Postma, "A Reassessment of the Dutch Atlantic Slave Trade," in Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 115-138; idem, "Surinam and Its Atlantic Connections, 1667-1795," in ibid, pp. 287-322; idem, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, Westport, Connecticut & London, UK: Greenwood Press, 2003; idem, "The Dimension of the Dutch Slave Trade from Western Africa," *Journal of African History*. Vol. 13, No. 2, 1972, pp. 237-247; idem, "The Dutch Participation in the African Slave Trade: Slaving on the Guinea Coast," Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Michigan State University, 1970; and Johannes Postma and Victor Enthoven, "Introduction," in Postma and Enthoven, *Riches from Atlantic Commerce*, pp. 1-16.

[4] Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

[5] See John K. Thornton, "On the Trail of Voodoo: African Christianity in Africa and the Americas," *The Americas*. Vol. 44, No. 3, 1988, pp. 261-278; idem, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian movement, 1684-1706*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Joseph C. Miller, "The Numbers, Origins, and Destinations of Slaves in the Eighteenth-Century Angolan Slave Trade," *Social Science History*. Vol. 13, No. 4, 1989, pp. 381-419; José C. Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830*. Boston: Brill, 2004.

[6] David Birmingham. *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese 1483-1790*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966. xiii.

the northern section of the West Central African Coast.[7] A reexamination of this region is long overdue in light of the new data available. More recently, a number of holes have been identified by Gwendolyn Hall[8] within the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade* database,[9] the most significant work on the quantification of the Atlantic slave trade to have appeared since Philip D. Curtin produced his census of the commerce.[10] A re-examination of Dutch trade relations in Loango will help to fill one of these holes.

This paper will re-examine the role of the Dutch in the Atlantic slave trade including the new data from the Atlantic slave trade database. In doing so, it will focus on the relationship between the Portuguese and Dutch slave traders in seventeenth century Loango. The Portuguese officially claimed Loango yet did not successfully dominate the area, in contrast to the areas successfully controlled by the Portuguese to the south. Whereas, the Dutch sustained a steady trading relationship with the Vili people, the dominant society in this area. There are two main reasons for this partnership between the Dutch and the Vili peoples: the importance of textiles to this society and the proximity of its ruler to the coast. These facts, in combination with the Vili ruler's skills at playing European traders against each other to maintain political control and economic advantage, enabled the Dutch to engage in trade in seventeenth century Loango while avoiding any major Portuguese resistance.

Before discussing the details of European trade with the people of Loango, a brief definition of the area and its people is required. In her seminal work on Loango, Phyllis Martin defines the Loango Coast as stretching 460 miles, or 740 kilometers, from Cape Lopez to the Congo River. This area includes three sheltered bays at Loango, Pointe-Noire, and Cabinda. Martin notes that in most cases ships anchored off the coast and traveled

[7] Phyllis M. Martin, *The External Trade of the Lonago Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Comercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango*. Claendon Press; Oxford, 1972.

[8] Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Link*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

[9] David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[10] Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

to land by way of smaller boats. Loango's coast was an area of great surf and occasional underwater earthquakes, which posed high risks for sailors.[11] These geographical features begin to explain what Martin describes as the "spasmodic and impermanent" European presence on this stretch of the western African coast.[12] This idea will be revisited later in this paper.

Loango itself contained four provinces: Loangiri (also Loango or Longo), Loangomongo (hilly Loango), Pili, and Chilongo.[13] Loango's sphere of influence stretched much farther and included tributary states such as Gobby, Sette, and Bukkameale to the north and to a lesser extent Kakongo and Ngoyo to the south.[14] Unlike the people of the Kongo and Angola, the Vili maintained their own trading routes to the interior to the exclusion of the Portuguese *pombeiros*.[15] These trade routes went from the Atlantic coast to Stanley Pool to the Teke town of Monsol where they traded for slaves, ivory, and copper. On trade routes to Jaga in the north-east the Vili sold European goods and salt in exchange for slaves, copper, and ivory.[16] Thus by acting as the middle men in the trade and though imposing tributes on neighbouring costal kingdoms, the trade policy of the Loango coast was a Vili trade policy and thus when referring to the traders and political actors on the Loango coast this paper will focus on the Vili people.

Although the primary and arguably most infamous export from the Loango coast was slaves, beginning in the late fifteenth century Portuguese traders sought palm-cloth, redwood, elephant tails, and copper to be traded for slaves in Angola and Niger, and ivory to be sold in Portugal.[17] Vansina

[11] Phyllis M Martain. *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870: The Effects of Changing Commercial Relations on the Vili Kingdom of Loango.* Oxford University Press, Oxford UK, 1972, p. 1.

[12] Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870,* p. vii.

[13] Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870,* pp. 11-12.

[14] Martin, *The External Trade of the Loango Coast 1576-1870,* pp. 16-7, 31.

[15] J. Vansina. "Long-Distance Trade-Routes in Central Africa," *The Journal of African History,* Vol. 3, No. 3, 1962, pp. 375-390. P. 378n. Vansina describes *pombeiro* as follows: "*Pombeiro* comes from *Mpumbu*, the name applied by the Kongo to Stanley Pool. The name is derived in Kongo from the Kikongo name for the Hum or Wumbu, living on the south bank of the Pool…[In] 1584, [it was used] as a generic name for trader in the interior."

[16] Vansina. "Long-Distance Trade-Routes in Central Africa," pp. 380.

[17] Eugenia W. Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640)," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Sep., 1974), pp. 419.

draws attention to the fact that ivory was a royal monopoly in Portugal during this period which indicates that the trade in ivory would have been minimal at best given the difficulties in selling it in Portugal.[18] Alternatively, ivory was the primary interest of the Dutch in Loango beginning in the late sixteenth century.[19]

Not until the Dutch occupation of Brazil and Angola in the 1630s did the Dutch develop a significant interest in the slave trade. In fact, all other trade with Loango declined to the point that between 1674 and 1740 only four Dutch ships are recorded to have been sent to Loango for cargo other than slaves.[20] Within the context of the transatlantic slave trade, scholars agree that the Dutch transported between four to five percent of slaves from Africa to the Americas, or approximately 545 000 slaves.[21] In contrast, the Portuguese accounted for the shipment of 33.6 percent of the slaves through out the Atlantic world, or approximately 3.4 million slaves.[22] In West Central Africa, Dutch slave trade accounted for 5 percent of the trade while Portuguese slave trade accounted for 55.8 percent of the trade. Remarkably, the Dutch slave trade in the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database's categories of Mpinda, Loango, Boary, and North Congo exceed the Portuguese trade, there being no record of Portuguese trading in Mpinda or Boary and Dutch exports exceeding Portuguese by a ratio of 5:1 in Loango and 59:1

[18] Vansina, 1962, 379.

[19] See the following travel logs: O. Dapper. *Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche Gewesten* (2nd Edition), Amsterdam, 1676; and, Pieter van den Broeke. *Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612).* Ed. J. D. La Fleur, Hakluyt Society: London, 2000.

[20] Vos, Eltis, Richardson, 3.

[21] Eltis, et al, *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database on CD-ROM.* This 1999 version of the database gives the Dutch has having embarked 527,700 slaves or 4.8 per cent of the total. The database in 2005, on the other hand, shows the Dutch has embarking 545,808 slaves or 4.4 per cent of the total. With the total number of slaves embarked having increased, the Dutch percentage has declined. See David Eltis, "The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment Based on the Second Edition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database," Unpublished paper, 2005, pp. 14-15. Postma, "Reassessment of Dutch Atlantic," p. 122, still claims that the Dutch exported 285,500 African slaves. For a more in-depth analysis of the significance of these numbers see Hogerzeil, Simon J. and David Richardson. "Slave Purchasing Strategies and Shipboard Mortalitiy: Day-to-Day Evidence from the Dutch African Trade, 1751-1797." *Journal of Economic History,* Vol. 67, No. 1 (March 2007) and Jelmer Vos, David Eltis and David Richardson. "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic." Forthcoming publication.

[22] Calculated using Eltis, et al's *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*. http://www.slavevoyages.org. 1st Query: Flag – Portuguese; 2nd Query: Flag – All.

in Congo North.[23] All of these locations are within the area defined as the Loango Coast in this paper.[24] These numbers clearly deviate from the overall trend of the transatlantic slave trade, which raises questions: why should the Dutch succeed where the Portuguese obviously struggled? and, was this area typical of slave trading areas, and if not, how did it differ?

First contact between the inhabitants of West Central Africa and the Portuguese can be dated to the late fifteenth century, though Martin argues that: "it was not until the last quarter of the sixteenth century and the founding of Luanda that the Portuguese established regular trade with the area."[25] Even then, the European presence was "spasmodic and impermanent" on this stretch of the western African coast.[26] The primary goal of the Portuguese was to obtain goods such as cloth and redwood from the Vili to trade in Luanda for slaves.[27] Martin suggests that the failure of the Portuguese to maintain control of this region was caused by competition of the Dutch, French, and English who "brought a more varied selection of trade goods, of better quality and cheaper prices".[28] José Curto seconds this suggestion stating "Most African slave suppliers preferred to trade with the Dutch, who offered better quality goods at lower prices than their Lusitanian competitors."[29] Yet, this does not explain why the Portuguese flourished in Angola rather than their competitors. Furthermore, Martin suggests that:

[23] Ibid. 1st Query: Flag – Dutch, Principle region of slave purchase – West Central Africa; 2nd Query: Flag – Portugal, Principle region of slave purchase – West Central Africa; 3rd Query: Flag – All, Principle region of slave purchase – West Central Africa. Note: the Portuguese statistics included all slaves shipped by Brazilians.

[24] Congo North is defined as "no dominant location, [Cape] Lopez to Congo" in Eltis, et al, *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database on CD-ROM*. 1999. It is assumed that the authors used the same definition in their online version of the database.

[25] Phyllis M. Martin, "The Cabinda Connection: A Historical Perspective," *African* Affairs, Vol. 76, No. 302. (Jan., 1977), p. 51.

[26] Martin, *The External Trade of the Lonago Coast 1576-1870,* p. vii.

[27] Vansina, "Long-Distance Trade-Routes in Central Africa," pp. 378-9 & Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640)", p. 419.

[28] Martin, "The Cabinda Connection: A Historical Perspective," p. 51. On the superiority of Dutch over Portuguese trade goods, also see José C. Curto. *Enslaving Spirits, The Portuguese-Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550-1830*. Boston: Brill, 2004, p. 62.

[29] José Curto, *Enslaving Spirits: The Portuguese Brazilian Alcohol Trade at Luanda and its Hinterland, c. 1550--1830*, p. 62.

> the Portuguese administration at Luanda was already over-extended in the hinterland of the colony [which caused] their repeated claims to the Cabinda area [to remain], for the most part, ineffective. Two military expeditions were sent to Cabinda in the course of the eighteenth century to counter English and French influence, but their success was short-lived.[30]

Still, this is a eurocentric position, not taking into consideration the ability of the people of Loango to influence the trade. It puts them at the mercy of competing European powers.

Understanding the internal and regional politics in Loango is key in reconstructing the Vili trade policy. In describing the kingdom of Loango, Van den Broeke records: "The king keeps his residence less than a mile inland in a town named Bansa de Loango [=Mbanza Loango], which lies on a very high hill and is an extremely pleasant location."[31] This proximity to the coast was important to personally maintaining tight control over trade relations on the coast without middle management. Martin suggests that this advantage of proximity was combined with a command of intense personal loyalty among the ruler's subjects:

> The ruler's authority was further evidenced as Europeans tried to open up trade. All had to have the Maloango's permission before they could start their business. No one was allowed ashore without a Vili escort. This shows a considerable royal authority not only over foreign businessmen but over the Maloango's own subjects.[32]

Loango had an active trade policy that included exporting to the north, east, and south. Martin reports:

> As early as the seventeenth century and probably before, the inhabitants of the Loango Coast enjoyed a wide reputation as peripatetic traders and caravaneers throughout West Central Africa, from Gabon to Luanda and from Pool Malebo to the Atlantic Ocean. Some of these [traders] established settlement abroad from where they could direct their trading interests.[33]

[30] Martin, "The Cabinda Connection: A Historical Perspective," pp. 34 & 51.

[31] Pieter van den Broecke. *Pieter van den Broecke's Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)*. Trans. and Ed. J. D. La Fleur. London: Hakluyt Society, 2000, p. 94.

[32] Martin, *The External Trade of the Lonago Coast 1576-1870,* p. 24.

[33] Martin, "The Cabinda Connection: A Historical Perspective", pp. 48 & 50.

This says two things: first and foremost, the Vili operated trading networks independent of Europeans throughout West Central Africa; second, the Vili operated trading networks that resembled Portuguese trading networks, forming permanent contacts in other kingdoms. Further research is needed to determine when these trading networks were established.

Pieter van den Broeke records an incident on 22 April 1608 which illustrates the informed, independent, and self-interested nature of the Vili ruler:

> [I have] heard that the Portuguese here at Loango had shot dead with a flintlock the master of the same yacht, named Augustijn Cornelissen, thinking that he was Pieter Brandt, whom they loathed unto death because he had revealed this place to our company. The Portuguese invited Pieter Tillemans, Pieter Brandt and the master to visit them. But Pieter Brandt, who was ill, or because his heart gave him warning, excused himself for that time and let the other two aforenamed persons go. And because the master had no hat to wear, he borrowed Pieter Brandt's. The Portuguese saw him coming and thought he was Pieter Brandt. As the *schuijdt* came alongside the ship they shot him dead with a long flintlock, and then the others were immediately taken prisoner to be taken to Loando de St. Pauwel [=Luanda; São Paulo de Luanda]. This they would have accomplished if the king of Loango's people had not followed them. [They] took them from Portuguese and right then and there struck the Portuguese master dead with elephant's tusks. Well, the Portuguese were forced to pay a large fine, which clearly showed that the natives were loyal to our nation.[34]

Van den Broeke saw this as preferential treatment for the Dutch. Though the Vili were capable of offering such preferential treatment, it does not appear to be an end in itself. Rather, it seems more likely that this was the people of Loango protecting their own monopoly over justice and trade rights in this region as the Portuguese had attempted to administer their own form of justice without regard for the law of the land. Up to this point, the Vili had shown clear interest in trading with both the Portuguese and the Dutch. When the Portuguese threatened these interests, the Vili acted, not in favour of the Dutch or against the Portuguese, but rather in their own favour. The Vili were sending a clear message: this is our territory, we

[34] Van den Broeke, *Pieter van den Broecke's Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)*. pp. 54–55.

hold the monopoly of power, and we will trade with whom we please. Also, by playing one trader against another, regardless of their nationality, the Vili may have been attempting to gain greater trading concessions from one or both parties involved. Whatever their motives, the strength of the Vili government in maintaining control over their exports and their active role in cultivating trade relationships with numerous nations limited the power of the Portuguese in that region.

Beyond national competitions and territorial defense, trade between Europeans and the Vili was successful as one nations supply met another's demand. In the case of the Dutch, they had cloth and wanted ivory and slaves. The Portuguese offered cloths, rugs, beads, and mirrors in exchange for ivory, skins, elephant's tails, palm-cloth, and redwood.[35] In their trading, the Dutch and the Portuguese had different approaches: The Dutch, working on a limited budget with little in the way of naval defense or permanent trading bases, sailed directly from the Netherlands with shipments of cloth to Loango, stayed until the ship was restocked with goods, and sailed to the point of sale in the Americas or the Netherlands.[36] In contrast, the Portuguese, having more resources in terms of naval defense and trading castles, made multiple stops. Birmingham describes this process:

> In the early seventeenth century much of the slave trade was conducted in two stages. In the first stage salt and shells as well as European trinkets and beads were used to buy palm-cloth from the people of the forest regions to the north and east of Kongo [the Loango Coast]. In the second stage this cloth, which was used for clothing as well as being the most widely accepted currency in Angola, was exchanged for slaves.[37]

Eugenia W. Herbert expands upon this idea in her article "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1442-1640)." Giving great attention to the details traders recorded about differing tastes in cloth, Herbert notes:

[35] Martin, *The External Trade of the Lonago Coast 1576-1870*, pp. 35, and Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola*, p. 79.

[36] For more details on Dutch shipping habits see *Pieter van den Broecke's Journal of Voyages to Cape Verde, Guinea and Angola (1605-1612)*.

[37] Birmingham, *Trade and Conflict in Angola*, p. 79.

> the goods in demand in the African markets were far more subject to changing tastes and the dictates of fashion than were the staples exported to Europe (gold, ivory, other raw materials and slaves). A type of bead or cloth popular at one moment might be virtually unsalable a few years later.[38]

One possible explanation for the relative failure of the Portuguese on the Loango coast was that with their neglect of the Loango markets, they were less able and willing than the Dutch to watch the ebbs and flows in the market, thus bringing out-dated or unsuitable trading goods. This would also explain Van den Broeke's perception of favour with the Vili ruler. Perhaps he was rewarding Van den Broeke for paying attention to his demands.

Contrary to Birmingham's interpretation of an African demand for "trinkets", Martin argues: "Indigenous populations were drawn to imported goods not in some simple-minded childish way, as some contemporary Europeans thought; rather, they appropriated foreign items in a purposeful manner derived from their pre-existing cultural perceptions."[39] In his study of trade on the Congo River, Robert Harms identifies three purposes for imported goods in West Central Africa: goods used in capital generation, goods used as currencies, and goods signifying status. Martin particularly focuses on cloth consumption as an example of calculated consumption. In Loango, cloth did not have the same value as cloth in Europe. Cloth was currency. Cloth was power. Martin explains:

> Clothing and accessories were little associated with utilitarian needs, since neither climate nor work conditions made them necessary. Rather, dress conveyed identity, status, values and a sense of occasion. The association of power and wealth, ostentatiously displayed, was deeply entrenched in equatorial African societies from the earliest times.[40]

Successful trading in the Loango not only required the ability to follow the Maloango's rules but also to know his tastes. Martin further describes

[38] Herbert, "Portuguese Adaptation to Trade Patterns Guinea to Angola (1443-1640)", p. 420.

[39] Phyllis M. Martin. "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," *Journal of African History*, 35, 1994, p. 405.

[40] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville", p. 401. Also see Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests*, Madison 1990, *The Tio Kingdom of Middle Congo, 1880-1892*, London, 1973.

the relationship between wealth and cloth: "It was also a true display of power since the cultivation of trees, the processing of the threads and the weaving of cloths represented an investment of labour that only big men could control."[41] There is perhaps at least one woman who is an exception to Martin's rule: the Makunda who in Martin's own words was "one of the most influential figures in Loango." [42] She acted as a judge for women's complaints and had the authority to overrule their husbands. She was also an advisor the Maloango.[43]

As time went on, the trade evolved. The Vili moved from more traditional forms of dress to styles more reliant on imports. At the same time, the increased availability of cloth allowed people of lower statuses to have access to these once symbolic commodities. Martin argues:

> In the 1880s, European travelers noted that cheap cottons from Manchester were driving local raphia cloth off the market in the Pool region, along the right tributaries of the Congo and on the Tio plateau. As imported trade cloth became more widely dispersed among common people, the powerful appropriated exotic clothing and accessories to underline their distinction. Social differentiation was thus maintained through the rarity of goods.[44]

What Martin does not mention here, is that although ornamental dress remained a social distinction, the power balance had shifted in this region. Chiefs who maintained their power did so by engaging in trade with European and Brazilian traders. At the same time, people of lower social status were able to rise to positions of prominence through engaging in trade.[45]

In conclusion, a study of the patterns of slave purchasing in West Central Africa shows that the Loango Coast, though interconnected with the West Central African coast, remained distinct from the Portuguese dominated trading system. Proximity to the coast in combination with strong centralized power allowed the Vili to negotiate with their trading partners on

[41] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," p. 403.
[42] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," pp. 24-5.
[43] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," pp. 24-5.
[44] Martin, "Contesting Clothes in Colonial Brazzaville," pp. 403-404.
[45] See Phyllis M Martin, "Family Strategies in Nineteenth-Century Cabinda," *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 28, No. 1. (1987), pp. 65-86.

their own terms: this discouraged permanent Portuguese settlement, while promoting the low investment, transient style of Dutch trading. The ability of the Dutch to cater to the ever-changing tastes of cloth in this region further strengthened their position among the Vili. Despite Vos, Eltis, and Richardson's recent argument that the Dutch play a "relatively small role" in the transatlantic slave trade,[46] their success in the Loango region indicates that they play a unique role in the Atlantic world. In my PhD studies I plan to conduct further research in the Middleburg Company records that should shed more light on this hitherto understudied area. I will also examine the recent rediscovery of the British travel logs of John Chambres Jones, whom the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database confirms as an investor in a Loango bound trading ship which will hopefully help to explain the role of the English in this area. The role of the French in this region also remains to be examined. As a region without permanent settlement until the late nineteenth century, records are fragmented thus curbing the interests of historians. Yet, the unique trading patterns of the Vili, in terms of the West Central African coast and in terms of the Atlantic world as a whole, requires further study and explanation.

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[46] Vos, Eltis, & Richardson, "The Dutch in the Atlantic World: New Perspectives from the Slave Trade with Particular Reference to the African Origins of the Traffic," p. 8.

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