Critical Source Analysis

Engendering West Central African History: The Role of Urban Women in Benguela in the Nineteenth Century

Mariana P. Candido

Abstract: This study stresses the role of common women in the history of Benguela in the nineteenth century. I emphasize the importance of parish records to unveil sectors of the society that tend to be invisible in the history of Angola, such as farmers, poor women who acted as vendors in the urban centers, and particularly, enslaved women. While some attention has been paid to merchant women, the so-called *donas*, and on political leaders, particularly Queen Nzinga, the same cannot be said about the poor and the enslaved women. Parish records allow us to access bits of information on the lives of women who did not leave written records and did not gain attention from the Portuguese authorities.

Résumé: Cet article souligne le rôle joué par les femmes du peuple dans l'histoire de Benguela au XIXème siècle. Ce papier met en valeur l'importance des registres paroissiaux pour révéler des secteurs de la société qui ont tendance à rester invisibles dans l'histoire de l'Angola, comme les agriculteurs, les femmes pauvres qui travaillaient comme vendeuses dans les centres urbains et, en particulier, les femmes esclaves. Alors que les femmes participant au commerce, appelées *donas*, et les dirigeants politiques comme particulièrement la reine Nzinga ont fait l'objet d'études, les pauvres et les femmes esclaves n'ont pas bénéficié du même traitement. Les registres paroissiaux nous permettent d'avoir accès à des miettes d'information sur

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la vie des femmes qui n'ont pas laissé de trace écrite et qui n'ont pas attiré l'attention des autorités portugaises.

Introduction[1]

In recent decades the studies on African women have expanded dramatically. Yet, most of these publications have focused on the twentieth century, during the colonial period, or after independence.[2] Scholars have also started exploring the arrival of Christian missionaries in the end of the nineteenth century and how they transformed the lives of African women with their own notions of morality, femininity, and motherhood, but also regarding labor and property control.[3] Fewer publications focus on women before the end of the nineteenth century, although an important number of these studies centered their analysis on West Central Africa.[4]

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to John Thornton, Jelmer Vos, Mariza de Carvalho Soares, Elizabeth Kuznesof, Kathleen Sheldon, who have read earlier versions, as well as the anonymous reader, who provided invaluable comments which helped me to improve the text.

[2] For some important contributions, see: Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy, *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2001); Kathleen E. Sheldon, *Pounders of Grain: A History of Women, Work, and Politics in Mozambique* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2002); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939–1958* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2005); Lorelle D. Semley, *Mother Is Gold, Father Is Glass: Gender and Colonialism in a Yoruba Town* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

[3] See: Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 1: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Phyllis Martin, *Catholic Women of Congo-Brazzaville: Mothers and Sisters in Troubled Times* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

[4] Joseph C. Miller, "Nzinga of Matamba in a New Perspective," *Journal of African History* 16–2 (1975), 201–216; John K. Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Selma Pantoja, "Quintandas e Quitandeiras: História e Deslocamento na nova lógica do espaço em Luanda," in: Maria Emília Madeira Santos (ed.), *África e a Instalação Do Sistema Colonial (c. 1885–c. 1935): Actas Da III Reunião Internacional de História de África* (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, 2000), 175–186; Selma Pantoja, "Inquisição, Degredo e mestiçagem em Angola no século XVII," *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões* 3–5/6 (2004), 117–136. For other important studies elsewhere in the continent, see: Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1996); Edna G. Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics, and Culture in the Kingdom*

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Facing the challenges of writing a more inclusive gendered history of the nineteenth- century West Central Africa, where not only wealthy women are seen as historical actors, but also those in a marginal position, such as farmers, petty traders, and enslaved women, I searched for notarial records following the footsteps of historians who have indicated their existence of such sources in Angola.[5] Inspired by Latin Americanists who have made extensive use of parish records to reconstruct the experiences of women, slaves, and other social actors marginalized in more traditional primary sources, I made several attempts to visit the Archdioceses of Luanda, in Angola, in order to locate more information about common free and the non-free women in the nineteenth century Benguela.[6] Parish records, alongside wills, nominal lists, and a variety of colonial documents registered the lives of common women in Benguela, yet not many

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of Dahomey (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women: Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (Islington: James Currey, 1993); Kristin Mann, "Women, Landed Property, and the Accumulation of Wealth in Early Colonial Lagos," *Signs* 16–4 (1991), 682–706; Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers and Joseph C. Miller (eds.), *Women and Slavery: Africa, the Indian Ocean World, and the Medieval North Atlantic* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2007); Eugénia Rodrigues, *Portugueses e africanos nos Rios de Sena. Os prazos da coroa em Moçambique nos séculos XVII e XVIII* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional/Casa da Moeda, 2014).

[5] Few historians have made use of notarial records in Angola. The pioneer, perhaps, is Carlos Pacheco. See: Carlos Pacheco, *José da Silva Ferreira: o homem e a sua época* (Luanda: União dos escritores angolanos, 1990). In subsequent years, other historians have made efforts to consult the Bispado de Angola. See: José Curto, "'As If from a Free Womb:' Baptismal Manumissions in the Conceição Parish, Luanda, 1778–1807," *Portuguese Studies Review* 10–1 (2002), 26–57; Lucilene Reginaldo, *Os Rosários dos Angolas: irmandades de africanos e crioulos na Bahia setecentista* (São Paulo: Alameda, 2011); Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[6] For influential studies making use of parish records, see: Elizabeth Kuznesof, *Household Economy and Urban Development: São Paulo, 1765 to 1836* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1986); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Elizabeth W. Kiddy, *Blacks of the Rosary: Memory and History in Minas Gerais, Brazil* (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Eduardo França Paiva, *Escravidão e Universo cultural na Colônia: Minas Gerais, 1716–1789* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2001); Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da Cor: Identidade Étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2000); Roberto Guedes, *Egressos do cativeiro: trabalho, família, aliança e mobilidade social (Porto Feliz, São Paulo, c.1798–c.1850)* (FAPERJ: Mauad X, 2008). In Angola, Contança do Nascimento da Rosa Ferreira de Ceita Miguel provided valuable help in accessing the Arquidiocese de Luanda and the Bishop Dom Damião António Franklin.

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specialists on the African past have explored their potential.[7] Africanists have much to gain from the methodological contributions advanced by specialists on Latin American history, who have managed to write the history of the impoverished and enslaved population, where women also played important roles.[8] Among other things, baptism, marriage, and burial records allow a reconstruction of family history and a better understanding of social mobility, complementing other sets of historical evidence, such as travelers' accounts and official correspondence. Ordinary women who lived in the center of Benguela or its suburbs did not leave diaries or memoirs, and very few of them were able to pay an attorney or priest to write down their wishes in wills or other official documents. Further, no one in twenty-first century Benguela, claims to be their descendant, which might have allowed for the existence of an oral family history, as can be found in other parts of the continent.[9] Many of the colonial documents, particularly official correspondence exchanged between authorities in Lisbon and in Benguela, underrepresented the general African population, particularly the poor, peasants, women, slaves, and the illiterate. In sum, the existence of the petty traders and the enslaved women of Benguela could be easily forgotten in Angolan historiography.

Alongside colonial documents, such as residential lists and censuses, notarial records offered me the possibility to get a glimpse into the lives of poor and enslaved women in Benguela during the nineteenth century. As historians working on Europe and Latin American have shown, parish

[7] The exceptions are specialists on South African history who have used parish records. See: Pamela Scully, *Liberating the Family?: Gender and British Slave Emancipation in the Rural Western Cape, South Africa, 1823–1853* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1997); Vertrees C. Malherbe, "In Onegt Verwekt: Law, Custom and Illegitimacy in Cape Town, 1800–1840," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 31–1 (2005), 163–185; Robert J. Ross, *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony, 1750–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus: A Ghost Story and a Biography* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Mary Caroline Craavens, "Manumission and the Life Cycle of a Contained Population: The VOC Lodge Slaves at the Cape of Good Hope, 1680–1730," in: Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks (eds.), *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World* (Columbia SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 99–119; Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652–1838* (Hanover NH: University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 332–349.

[8] For important works, see: Laura de Mello e Souza, *Desclassificados do Ouro: A Pobreza Mineira no Século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1982); João José Reis, *Death is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Hebe Mattos, *Ao sul da história. Lavradores pobres na crise do trabalho escravo* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV editora, 2009).

[9] Hilary Jones, *The Métis of Senegal: Urban Life and Politics in French West Africa* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2013).

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records are full of short life stories, which can assist us in reconstructing how African women maneuvered around a colonial society that otherwise ignored them.[10] These sources also permit us to see the power of the archives and the state in creating classifications and social hierarchies. The notarial records might give the impression of being unbiased sources, appearing as straightforward sets of statistical information collected by colonial officers, who were well informed and able to classify the subject population "objectively," recording self-evident differences. But as other scholars remind us, these sources are "coded texts, in which social categories were manipulated in function with gender and gender relations."[11] It is clear that what colonial officers and priests reported as "observations" were informed by social expectations regarding place of residence, affiliation, language skills, and economic activities. We should not forget how gender also affected and affects perceptions of skin color and racial classification. These documents, although produced by colonial officers invested in maintaining patriarchal values and colonial subjects' subordination, reveal the importance of women in the social fabric of Benguela. And, despite constant efforts to control and regulate women's activities, colonial officers and priests recorded how women occupied public and private spaces, and shaped the operation of the colonial society in nineteenth-century Benguela.

There is a substantial literature about merchant women on the coast of Africa. Scholars have researched the role of African women as cultural intermediaries and economic agents, such as the case of the s*ignares* of St. Louis or Gorée, the *nharas* of Cacheu, and the *donas* of Luanda and Mozambique.[12] Studies have also emphasized the role of women in Christian missions,

[10] See: Hebe Mattos, *Das Cores do Silêncio: Os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista: Brasil século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995); Sheila de Castro Faria, *A colônia em movimento: fortuna e família no cotidiano colonial* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1998); Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "A Biografia de Ignácio Monte, o Escravo Que Virou Rei," in: Ronaldo Vainfas (ed.), *Retratos do Império. Trajetórias Individuais no Mundo Português nos séculos XVI a XIX* (Niteroí: EDUFF, 2006), 47–68; Douglas C. Libby, "Notarized and Baptismal Manumissions in the Parish of São José do Rio das Mortes, Minas Gerais (c. 1750–1850)," *The Americas* 66–2 (2009), 211–240, Natalie Z. Davis, "Decentering History: Local Stories and Cultural Crossings in a Global World," *History & Theory* 50–2 (2011), 188–202; Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[11] Elizabeth Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences on 'Spanish' Creole Society in Colonial Spanish America," *Colonial Latin American Review* 4–1 (1995), 153–176, 163.

[12] George E. Brooks, "A Nhara of Guine-Bissau Region: Mãe Aurélia Correia," in: Claire C. Robertson and Martin A Klein (eds.), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 295–317; James Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113–114; Philip J. Havik, "Comerciantes e

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women as farmers, as subjects who suffered economic and social exclusion at the eve of European colonialism, and women as rulers and matriarchs.[13] These studies recuperate women's role, retrieving them from previous analysis that had insisted in on invisibility. Women's historical agency is evident in case studies that indicate the variety of roles occupied by women and the significance of their contributions.[14]

In Angola, as elsewhere, African women were largely excluded from the colonial administration and other political processes that affected their lives, from the interpretation of metropolitan legal codes to the administration of the bureaucracy, as well as the enforcement of ecclesiastic, civil, and criminal laws. If we limited our study to the official correspondence, the legislation, or even the writings of colonial officers stationed in Benguela, we might think that African women were not active or were not important. However, these same documents, when read against the grain, reveal how the Portuguese administration failed in implementing and imposing these legal, economic and social systems and restrictions over the population they were supposed to rule and control. The local population negotiated, challenged and even ignored many of the colonial legislation, as scholars have demonstrated.[15]

The traces of how enslaved and poor women showed up in colonial documents allow scholars to write a history of those excluded from the

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Concubinas: Sócios estratégicos no Comércio Atlântico na Costa da Guiné," in: *I Reunião Internacional de História da África* (São Paulo: CEA-USP/SDG-Marinha/CAPES, 1996), 161–179; Selma Pantoja, "Gênero e Comércio: As Traficantes de Escravos na Região de Angola," *Travessias* 4/5 (2004), 79–97; Selma Pantoja, "Women's Work in the Fairs and Markets of Luanda," in: Clara Sarmento (ed.), *Women in the Portuguese Colonial Empire: the Theater of Shadows* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 81–93; José Capela, *Donas, Senhores e Escravos* (Porto: Afrontamento, 1995); Eugénia Rodrigues, "Chiponda, a Senhora que tudo pisa com os pés. Estratégias de poder das donas dos prazos do Zambeze no século XVIII," *Anais de História de Além-Mar* 1 (2000), 101–132.

[13] Thornton, *The Kongolese Saint Anthony*; Elizabeth Schmidt, "Farmers, Hunters, and Gold-Washers: A Reevaluation of Women's Roles in Precolonial and Colonial Zimbabwe," *African Economic History* 17 (1988), 45–80; Pamela Scully and Clifton Crais, "Race and Erasure: Sara Baartman and Hendrik Cesars in Cape Town and London," *Journal of British Studies* 47–2 (2008), 301–323.

[14] Eugénia Rodrigues, "Colonial Society, Women and African Culture in Mozambique," in: Clara Sarmento (ed.), *From Here to Diversity: Globalization and Intercultural Dialogues* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 253–274; Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy, "Introduction," in: Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl McCurdy (eds.), *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2001), 1–24.

[15] José C. Curto, "Struggling Against Enslavement: The Case of José Manuel in Benguela, 1816–20," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39–1 (2005), 96–122; José C. Curto, "The Story of Nbena, 1817–1820: Unlawful Enslavement and the Concept of 'Original Freedom' in Angola," in: Paul E. Lovejoy and David V. Trotman (eds.),

highest levels of political and economic decisions. Rather than writing a history from the point of view of the colonizers, parish records allow us to read between the lines and reconstruct how enslaved and poor women lived in Benguela for most of the nineteenth century. These were not powerful women in control of their options, but they were aware of their position in a colonial society and they made efforts to build social networks and to guarantee protections, as the parish records reveal.[16] Thus, it is possible to write about the underrepresented sectors of society, mainly the unfree and poor women, before the twentieth century. It is inspired by the work of historians who have shown that even when a person is in a single document, that one reference is evidence that contributes to examining marginalized women and uncovering their agency, despite the silence of other records.[17]

Baptism Records and Women in Benguela

In the case of Angola, scholars such as José Curto, Lucilene Reginaldo, and Roquinaldo Ferreira have begun to explore the ecclesiastical documents and have consulted the parish archives held at the Arquivo do Bispado de Luanda (ABL).[18] However, their focus was not necessarily on poor and enslaved women, although their research revealed a great deal about the social life of slaves in Luanda and Benguela. Through the ecclesiastical

Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora (London: Continuum, 2003), 44–64; Mariana P. Candido, "African Freedom Suits and Portuguese Vassal Status: Legal Mechanisms for Fighting Enslavement in Benguela, Angola, 1800–1830," *Slavery & Abolition* 32–3 (2011), 447–459; Kalle Kananoja, "Healers, Idolaters, and Good Christians: A Case Study of Creolization and Popular Religion in Mid-Eighteenth Century Angola," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43–3 (2010), 443–465.

[16] For more on this, see: Napur Chaudhuri, Sherry J. Katz and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Karen Graubart, *With Our Labor and Sweat: Indigenous Women and the Formation of Colonial Society in Peru, 1550–1700* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5–22.

[17] Among others, see: Natalie Z. Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3–3/4 (1976), 83–103. For the influential work by Latin Americanist historians and their creative use of notarial records see, among others: Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Paiva, *Escravidão e universo cultural*; Soares, *Devotos da Cor*; Soares, "A Biografia de Ignácio Monte;" Reginaldo, *Os Rosários dos Angolas*. For examples elsewhere, see: Gwendolyn M. Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Mariza de Carvalho Soares, Jane Landers, Paul Lovejoy and Andrew McMichael, "Slavery in Ecclesiastical Archives: Preserving the Records," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86–2 (2006), 337–346.

[18] See: Curto, "'As If from a Free Womb:'" Reginaldo, *Os Rosários dos Angolas*; Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World*.

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evidence they reconstructed social links and Atlantic connections of some of the men and women who lived in Luanda and Benguela before the twentieth century. And it is in their footsteps that I started using the documents of the ABL. Yet, very few scholars have made used of this archive, in part due to the difficulty in accessing the collection. The ABL is not a public archive, nor is it under the control of the national archive of Angola (Arquivo Histórico de Angola) or the Ministry of Culture. The ABL is a private archive, located in the offices of archbishop of Angola and its access depends on personal connections, favors, and the approval of the Bishop himself.

The first time I was allowed to consult the collection, in 2009, I had to schedule a personal audience with Bishop Damião António Franklin (1950–2014) to explain my research and my interest in the ecclesiastical documents. After the first audience, I had to come back twice for more chats and personal negotiation. After some weeks of long chats, attending masses, and insistence, I was granted access to the archives. The second time, in 2011, was relatively easier, since it only involved submitting a written request and waiting ten days for its approval.[19] In the end, I was only able to consult the documents for two days, since I was leaving Angola shortly. But the access was less personal and less arbitrary.

In both circumstances, I encountered parish records without any obvious organization, including finding some books on the floor, and several books that were damaged or at risk from insects, climate, and lack of conservation. Rats wandered through the rooms where books and documents were stored, further compromising the historical documents. The lack of air conditioning or any kind of preservation has harmed books and one can only wonder how many other baptism, marriage, and burial records might have been lost in the past three hundred years.

Very few resources are devoted to conserving these documents, and very few priests or laypeople recognize the value of these documents for the study of the Angolan past.[20] These are seen and labeled "*arquivo morto*," or useless archives by the ABL's staff. In a country where many people have been displaced during four decades of colonial and civil wars, with some having lost their government issued identity documents, Angolan citizens search the ABL for more information about deceased relatives or in search of proof of their birth in order to get a new identity cards. Parish records are accepted as official evidence for Angolans in search of showing a family link with Portugal, for example, in order to emigrate. Thus, the staff is there to help Angolans locate baptism, marriage or burial records of parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. The "*arquivo morto*" is considered old paper, with no value or importance in contemporary Angola. Those documents, however, reveal an

[19] Jelmer Vos was of key assistance in negotiating access to the documents in 2011. He presented my request while I was in Benguela.

[20] This situation is not unique to Angola. For similar cases see: Soares *et al.*, "Slavery in Ecclesiastical Archives," 338–339.

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important aspect of Angolan cultural heritage and should be available for anyone trying to reconstruct the social history of West Central Africa.

The lack of an inventory or a registry of books makes it extremely difficult to identify what has been misplaced, lost or never produced.

For the parish of Nossa Senhora do Pópulo in Benguela I have been able to locate nine baptism books, for the following years.

In these books, 10,020 baptismal entries have been identified (see Table 1). It is not clear what happened to other baptism books. In the case of churches located in the interior of Benguela, we know that a fire struck the Nossa Senhora de Santa Ana located in the Vila Viçosa village, a short-lived Portuguese center in the the *sobado* of Kitata, sometime between 1769 and 1774, and the baptism books were lost, according to an annotation made in 1774.[21] Similar episodes likely happened in Benguela, leading to the loss of important historical documents.

The *Concílio de Trento* (11 November 1563) and, later on, the *Constituições Primeiras da Bahia* regulated the collection of baptismal, marriage, and burial records, and recognized their central importance to the expansion of Portuguese colonialism and conversion of the so-called "heathens."[22] Despite a Vatican decision regarding what to record and what to ignore, the ecclesiastical agents had a certain degree of autonomy on the format and the details entered in each entry, called an *assento*. As a result, each priest left his imprint on the sacraments he performed and collected, which is very clear in the records available for Benguela. While some priests provided detailed information on those participating in the sacraments, others were more succinct, limiting the records to names and dates.

In general, the registers before 1814 recorded the name of each child or adult baptized, his or her skin color and legal status, and place of birth. Registers classified infants and adults according to their legitimacy in the eyes of the Catholic Church, that is, if the baptized was born outside of wedlock, she or he was registered as *natural*. *Natural* was also the label used for children only registered by their mothers, which opened the space for a future marriage and a possible recognition of paternity, which would result in the "legitimation" of the offspring. Baptized children or adults could also be considered *legítimo* if the parents had married in the Catholic

[21] Arquivo do Bispado de Luanda (ABL), Caconda, Livro de Batismo, 1771–1836, fl. 22, 2 February 1774. Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 284.

[22] For more on this, see: Iraci del Nero da Costa, "Registros Paroquiais: Notas Sobre os Assentos de Batismo, Casamentos e Óbitos," *Laboratório de Pesquisa Histórica – Revista de História* 1–1 (1990), 46–54; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "A conversão dos escravos africanos e a questão do gentilismo nas *Constituições Primeiras da Bahia,"* in: Bruno Feitler and Evergton Sales Souza (eds.), *A Igreja no Brasil. Normas e práticas durante a vigência das Constituições Primeiras do Arcebispado da Bahia* (São Paulo: Unifesp, 2011), 303–321.

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Table 1. Baptism Records of the parish of Nossa Senhora do Pópulo in Benguela

Dates	Number of Registers
1794–1814	2,128
1814–1832	597
1832–1840	588
1846–1849	1,998
1849–1850	934
1851–1853	1,842
1859–1861	1,564
1877–1879	250
1880	119
TOTAL	**10,020**

Church. In the case of slaves, the name of the owner was registered. Following the initial information, the priest recorded the name of the mother, her skin color, place of origin, and status (free, freed, or enslaved). In the case of enslaved mothers, once again, the name of the slaveholder was recorded. The same information was recorded about the father, godfather, and godmother. In the case of representatives, the priests also noted their names. After dating the register, the priest signed the form.

Information about skin color, status, age, and economic activities were not necessarily recorded for every single individual present at the baptism or otherwise involved. Or even worse, in some cases, priests insisted in recording skin color, while in others this information is neglected. For example, on 5 December 1807, the priest João dos Santos baptized Maria, who was freed upon her baptism. No information about Maria's skin color was recorded, but her mother was identified as black Ana, or *Preta Ana*, slave of Maurício Nunes Soares. The father was incognito or unknown. The fact that the young Maria was freed by Nunes Soares suggests that he might have been her father.[23] In the Portuguese empire, and Benguela seems not to be an exception, children freed at the baptismal basin tended to maintain family links with the slave owners. Although there is no recognition of paternity, similar cases in Luanda suggest that the father of the child was the owner of her mother.[24] This case also shows how reference to skin color was subject to the interest of the priest. While Ana was registered as black Ana, there is no mention to the color classification of her daughter and her slave master in the baptism register. While the skin color of mothers was carefully scrutinized and recorded

[23] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1794–1814, fl. 248v, 5 December 1807.
[24] Curto, "'As If from a Free Womb,'" 43–44.

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by priests, the same cannot be said about the children baptized. Moreover, this case highlights the widespread experience of illegitimacy among the children baptized in the Benguela church. Although the expansion of Catholicism was considered an important factor in the Portuguese colonial enterprise, very few people married in the Catholic Church. Illegitimacy was evident in baptismal and marital records, and it was also mentioned when people petitioned for administrative positions or even disputed the content of wills.[25]

By 1846 some changes were introduced in the baptismal register. The individual names, status, and condition of legitimacy were recorded, but "*nação*" was introduced to capture the place of birth of the adult or child baptized.[26] As previously in the case of slaves, the priest recorded the name of the slave owner, making sure that bondage was established in the ecclesiastical document. Priests also recorded the names of the parents, their skin color, status, and their master if they were not free. References to skin color were made when the priest found that information to be relevant. For example, on 18 October 1846, when Amália, who was considered an adult woman of approximately eleven years old, was baptized, the priest did not mention her skin color. She was identified as from the *nação* Hera and her owner, Josefa Mendes, was registered as a black woman. There was no information about the parents of Amália, since she was probably brought from the interior in a slave coffle to Benguela and sold there to Josefa Mendes. Although the priest Bernando José Pinheiro recorded the skin color of the slave-owner, Josefa Mendes, he failed to mention the color of the godparents, José Gonçalves and Clementina Mendes. Or perhaps the lack of reference was intentional, allowing José Gonçalves and Clementina Mendes to enjoy some degree of color freedom in a society strongly influenced by ideas of captivity, blood purity, and legality.[27] The fact that this lapse might have been intentional becomes clear when compared to other cases. The same priest, Bernardo José Pinheiro, carefully recorded the skin color of other godparents, such as the case of Luzia

[25] For similar cases elsehwhere in the Portuguese empire, see: Eliane C. Lopes, *O Revelar do Pecado. Os filhos ilegítimos na São Paulo do século XVIII* (São Paulo: Annablume, 1998), 25–26.

[26] *Nação* was a term widely employed in Brazil to "objectively" identify the origin of enslaved African. The terminology is often unclear, in most cases referring to slaving ports on the African coast, such as "Calabar," "Benguela," or "Angola." In some cases origin is even more diffuse with terminology such as "Costa da Mina," and "Guiné," covering vast regions. For more on "*nações*," see: João José Reis, "Identidade e diversidades étnicas nas irmandades negras no tempo da escravidão," *Tempo* 2–3 (1996), 7–33; Mariza de Carvalho Soares, "A 'nação' que se tem e a 'terra' de onde se vem: categorias de inserção social de africanos no Império Português, século XVIII," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 26–2 (2004), 303–330.

[27] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1846–1849, fl. 17V, 18 October 1846. See also: Reginaldo, *Os Rosários dos Angolas*, 40–79; Candido, "O Limite Tênue."

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Pedro, registered as a black woman. Luzia was the godmother of Teresa, an adult woman of Caluquembe baptized on 24 October 1846.[28] Curiously, no reference was made to the skin color of Luzia's owner, Dona Joana Mendes, one of the famous merchant women of Benguela. Again, it might have been a failure of priest to record this information. But in a different set of document, Dona Joana Mendes was identified as a black woman. In her 1861 will, Dona Joana Mendes was described as a single black woman, born in the interior, in the region of Libolo.[29] As she was a wealthy resident of Benguela, the priest might have avoided racially classifying her. It is difficult to understand why and how skin color was ignored in some records, such as parish records, but emphasized in others, such as wills. It was probably related to the social position of the individual being observed and the relationship established between that person and the official who was recording attributes that referred more to social and economic position than to phenotype classifications.

After 1877, priests started recording the date of birth of the baptized, as well as the place of residency and occupation of parents. The name of the father was, for the first time, recorded before the name of the mother of the person baptized. For example, in July 1877, the two month-old Carolina was baptized. She had been born on 14 May 1877 in Benguela.[30] Her father, Francisco Quimuca, was from the fortress of Caconda in the interior, but resided in Benguela. Quimuca was single and worked as a stonemason. It is not clear how long he was in a relationship with Catarina Gueva, the mother of young Carolina. Catarina was a single woman from Bailundu, who lived in Benguela working as a laundress. The godparents, both resident in Benguela, were Augusto Rodrigues Varela, who worked in public works as an officer in the colonial administration, and Alexandrina Salvador. Although the record does not reveal the skin color of the godparents, we know that the father, Quimuca, as well as the godfather, were able to sign their own names. Their occupations and ability to read and write suggest colonial insertion and cultural adaptation.[31]

[28] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1846–1849, fl. 20, 24 October 1846.

[29] Comarca Judicial de Benguela (CJB), Processos, 1861, maco 3, processo 42, "Autos Civis de Joana Mendes de Morais," 11 June 1861.

[30] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1877–1879, fl. 9v, 15 July 1877.

[31] Linda M. Heywood, "Portuguese into African: The Eighteenth Century Central African Background to Atlantic Creole Culture," in: Linda M. Heywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91–114; Kananoja, "Healers, Idolaters, and Good Christians." For more on the importance of writing, see: Carlos Pacheco, "Leituras e Bibliotecas em Angola na primeira metade do século XIX," *Locus (Juiz de Fora)* 6–2 (2000), 21–41; Beatrix Heintze, "A Lusofonia no Interior da África Central na era pré-colonial. Um Contributo para a sua História e Compreensão na Actualidade," *Cadernos de Estudos Africanos* 6/7 (2005), 179–207.

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In most records slaves, freed slaves, and poor people were mentioned briefly, sometimes just by their Catholic names and place of origin, but the in-depth analysis of these records reveals the social networks that slave families established. Curiously, the baptisms of free and enslaved individuals were registered in the same book, unlike in Brazil, where even the ecclesiastical records were segregated. Baptismal records also indicate social mobility and the role of manumission in keeping the colonial slave society in check and the slave population under control. Like in Luanda and other parts of the Portuguese empire, manumission was relatively common and allowed the incorporation of former enslaved people into colonial society, sometimes as slaveholders.[32] This was the case of the slaves of José Antonio de Carvalho, who died in Benguela in 1798. In his will he acknowledged that he was the father of three children, Guiomar, Isabel, and Antonio, from three different enslaved women. Guiomar was the daughter he had with one of his slaves, named Bibiana. In his will, Carvalho freed Bibiana and offered her 50,000 *réis* in textiles and a *molecona*, a young slave woman "of the many she has in her company besides a slave girl I offered her." Another enslaved woman, called Josefa, who was pregnant at the time of his death, was also freed, and received 30,000 *réis* in textiles and a young slave girl. Besides his former lovers, his daughters were also rewarded with slaves.[33]

In the case of parish records, many baptisms were accompanied by priests' observations regarding the manumission of the baptized infant. On some occasions, priests recorded the amount paid for the manumission at the baptismal font, the reasons for freeing the enslaved, and the witnesses. The baptismal record, in these cases, acted as a letter of liberty for children or adults. For example, in 1809, Maria, a young girl was freed at the baptismal font. Her mother, Marcelina, was a slave of António do Campos Trovão. The father was declared incognito, suggesting that the slave master was the father.[34] In the 1794–1814 baptismal book, 72 children were freed upon their baptism (an average of 3.6 per year), while a few decades later, in the 1846–1849 book, only one case was registered, a decrease to 0.25 per year. In 1848, an adult man named Gabriel, from Ganguela, was

[32] For some examples, see: Curto, "'As If from a Free Womb;'" Libby, "Notarized and Baptismal Manumissions;" Mariana Dantas, *Black Townsmen: Urban Slavery and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 97–126; Douglas C. Libby and Clotilde A. Paiva, "Manumission Practices in a Late Eighteenth-Century Brazilian Slave Parish: São José d'El Rey in 1795," *Slavery and Abolition* 21–1 (2000), 96–127.

[33] Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Feitos Findos, Justificações Ultramarinas, África, mç 22, doc. 5, 19 January 1802. For other cases of freed people rewarded with slaves, see: Mariana Candido, "Concubinage and Slavery in Benguela, c. 1750–1850," in: Olatunji Ojo and Nadine Hunt (eds.), *Slavery in Africa and the Caribbean: A History of Enslavement and Identity Since the 18th Century* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), 65–84.

[34] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1794–1814, fl. 271, 26 June 1809.

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freed by his owner, Francisco Higino Craveiro Lopes, at his baptism without any stipulation or justification.[35] Manumissions at the baptismal basin diminished dramatically between 1814 and 1849.

More analysis of the parish records and manumissions at the font will have to be carried out to confirm what seems to be a consensus in the literature related to manumission in the Portuguese empire: that enslaved women were more likely to be manumitted than male slaves.[36] Another aspect that deserves attention concerns the selection of godparents, particularly for enslaved mothers baptizing their children from a non-identified father to see if, as in Brazil, "god parentage was not generally used to reinforce the paternalist aspects of the master-slave relationship."[37] It will be important to explore the skin color and legal status of godparents to learn whether the choice of godparents, particularly of children of the enslaved population, replicated the color and status hierarchies of Benguela.

There are a series of problems with the baptism records available for Benguela and its interior. First, only a minority of the population is represented, since few individuals turned to the Catholic Church to baptize their children or their slaves, as can be seen by the small number of registers per year. As a result, the records are more detailed and better representative of the Portuguese and Brazilian residents in Benguela than of the African population. Second, an unknown number of books have been lost or misplaced and those that survived sometimes contain illegible records due to pest or water damage. Third, demographic analyses of the population based on the parish records can be a challenge since there are several individuals registered with a single name, such as the dozens of Marias, Josés, or Franciscas recorded without any last names; or even two or three João Carvalhos or Maria Josés, as such common names could belong to more than one person. Another challenging task, however, is dealing with pages that are apparently missing from some books, suggesting that they have been removed for reasons which are not clear. These issues are not exclusive to Benguela, as scholars working with notarial records elsewhere have noticed the same difficulties and challenges.[38]

[35] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1846–1849 fl. 146v, 3 July 1848.

[36] Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: Bahia, 1684-1745," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54–4 (1974), 603–635; Manolo Florentino (ed.), *Tráfico, Cativeiro e Liberdade: Rio de Janeiro, Séculos XVII-XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005); Paiva, *Escravidão e Universo Cultural*; Mieko Nishida, "Manumission and Ethnicity in Urban Slavery: Salvador, Brazil, 1808–1888," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 73–3 (1993), 361–391; Libby, "Notarized and Baptismal Manumissions."

[37] Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels*, 142.

[38] Soares, "A conversão dos escravos africanos," 303–321; Schwartz, "The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil;" James H. Sweet, "Manumission in Rio de Janeiro, 1749–54: An African Perspective," *Slavery & Abolition* 24–1 (2003), 54–70; Libby, "Notarized and Baptismal Manumissions."

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Regarding the missing records, it is worth mentioning that in some cases people asked for the original record to be inserted in the baptismal book, suggesting that the original baptism was not located. From the records, it appears that the priests did not register baptisms immediately after the ceremony, and the delay between the baptism and the annotation in the parish books may explain the reason behind some records being misplaced. For example, in 1800 Joana Pereira da Silva requested the inclusion of her original baptism in the Nossa Senhora do Pópulo records. She claimed that her original baptism records were missing, despite the fact that her mother, Dona Aguida Gonçalves da Silva, and several witnesses insisted that the baptism had taken place in 1785. In this case, the identity of Joana's father was crucial in a legal dispute related to his will. According to the witnesses in this process, Nuno Joaquim Pereira da Silva had registered Joana as his daughter, and he had accompanied Dona Aguida in the baptism ceremony.[39] If the displacement of the baptismal records of wealthy residents happened, one can only imagine the vulnerability of poor and enslaved women, who sometimes depended on the parish records as a proof of paternity or even for their freedom.

Despite their limitations, these records provide an abundance of data on people who remain invisible or unaccounted for in other historical documents. Moreover, these records provide information about social networks. Baptism and marriages were not only religious sacraments that emphasized belonging to a religious community, they were important events, where free and enslaved women expressed and reinforced solidarity links, or even forged new ones with the godparents of their children.[40] Thus, despite the problems related to the collection of the data, the limited scope of the population, the colonial gaze that was revealed, plus the difficulties related to scholars having access, parish records provide information about family life, solidarity networks, and dependency that are not evident in other historical records. However, the fact that people sought to participate in the Catholic sacraments for themselves or their children should not be read as acculturation or even assimilation into the Portuguese Catholic world. Belonging to the Catholic community was almost a requirement for those who lived in the colonial urban centers. Baptism protected people against enslavement, for example, and created a series of rights that differentiated assimilated people from the rest of the population. People, however, continued

[39] Joana was listed as "natural," rather than "legitimate," see: ABL, Benguela, Batismo, 1794–1814, fl. 138-138v, no date 1785. I explore this case in greater detail in: Candido, "Marchande de Benguela."

[40] Soares, *Devotos da Cor*; Farias, *Colônia em Movimento,* 304–305; Guedes, *Egressos do Cativeiro*, 127–130.

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to worship their ancestors and to follow habits that were unwelcome in the Catholic world.[41]

In Angola, ecclesiastical documents recorded the presence of people not seen as important in oral traditions, including rulers who were forgotten. One example was Joanes José Gaspar, who was omnipresent in colonial records and ecclesiastical documents in the early nineteenth century and who is not remembered in official oral traditions.[42] Gaspar was the *soba*, or the local ruler, of Dombe Grande, a chiefdom southeast of Benguela, for most of the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet he is not remembered even by the *mais velhos,* the elders, of Dombe Grande nowadays. Records, however, reveal the centrality of his family in the interactions between the colonial administration and the local political elites. Gaspar and his children dominated the parish records of Benguela and Dombe Grande for most of the nineteenth century, yet their existence has been erased from oral tradition.[43] Thus, ecclesiastical documents can provide a look into the past that other sets of sources, including oral traditions, neglect.

Marriage Records and African Women

While baptismal records include information about the enslaved population, the marriage records refer mainly to the free population. As can be seen in Table 2, of the 144 records from 1806–1853, only on four occasions were there references to the legal status of women, and those referred to freed women (two were registered as freed black women and two as mixed race). Although there is no mention to the legal status of the other women and men, the statement that four women were freed suggests that all the other records refer to

[41] For the literature on how Christian sacraments created rights, see: Candido, "O Limite Tênue," 239–268; Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Making of the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For the coexistence of different religious practices, see: Kananoja, "Healers, Idolaters, and Good Christians," 443–465; James H. Sweet, "Mutual Misunderstandings: Gesture, Gender and Healing in the African Portuguese World," *Past & Present* 203–4 (2009), 128–143.

[42] For more on the limitations of oral traditions in the reconstruction of the history of slavery and former slaves, see: Martin A. Klein, "Studying the History of Those Who Would Rather Forget: Oral History and the Experience of Slavery," *History in Africa* 16 (1989), 209–217.

[43] For the case of Joanes Gaspar, see: Candido, *An African Slaving Port: Benguela*, 23; Mariana P. Candido, "Slave Trade and New Identities in Benguela, 1700–1860," *Portuguese Studies Review* 19–1/2 (2011), 59–75; Roquinaldo Ferreira, "Biografia como história social: o clã Ferreira Gomes e os mundos da escravização no Atlântico Sul," *Varia Historia* 29–51 (2013), 679–719.

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Table 2. Marriage Records of the parish of Nossa Senhora do Pópulo in Benguela

Dates	Number of Registers
1806–1853	144
1876–1879	5
TOTAL	**149**

free people. More revealing is the fact that all the freed women married freed men. Missing from the marriage book is any record of marriage between enslaved people, suggesting that in Benguela marriage in the Catholic Church was not as important as the baptism for the general population.[44]

The records in the marriage book shed some light on the lives of freed women and even poor women, but do not offer clues on the relationships of enslaved women. As mentioned earlier, no case of a slave getting married was found. For example, in 1806, Josefa Pereira, a freed black woman "*natural* of this continent" married Joaquim dos Santos Pires, a freed black man "also *natural* of this continent."[45] Not much information is available about this couple, except their names, their status as free people, and their classification as black people born in the African continent. More revealing is that freed black women in Benguela married men in the same condition, freed men like themselves. There is no record of a free woman marrying a free man, for example, indicating how racial and status classifications limited the number of partners available. The other cases of freed women who were married in Benguela are Marta Maria da Conceição, a freed black woman who married Francisco Xaviers da Costa, a black freed man from São Tomé; Dona Dionizia Teodora da Silva, a freed *parda* from Rio de Janeiro who contracted marriage with Alvaro Ferreira da Souza, a freed *pardo* from Bahia; and Inês Xavier de Almeida, a freed *parda* woman, with no reference to her place of origin, who married João Modersto, a freed *pardo* man from Rio de Janeiro, who acted as surgeon assistant in the army.[46] *Pardo* is particularly a difficult term to translate into English, since it meant different things in different contexts. In late eighteenth-century Angola, *pardo* was a synonym for *fusco* or "civilized mixed race" people.[47]

[44] This is the same for other regions of the Portuguese empire. See: Farias, *A Colônia em Movimento*, 304.

[45] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Casamento, 1806–1854, fl. 1, 18 June 1806.

[46] These cases were annotated at, respectively, ABL, Benguela, Livro de Casamento, 1806–1854, fl. 1, 18 June 1806; ABL, Benguela, Livro de Casamento, 1806–1854, fl.1, 6 November 1806; ABL, Benguela, Livro de Casamento, 1806–1854, fl. 19, 18 November 1820; ABL, Benguela, Livro de Casamento, 1806–1854, fl. 19v, 12 February 1820.

[47] Elias A. da Silva Corrêa, *História de Angola* (Lisbon: Ática, 1937), 1, 83.

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Pardo designated those who, regardless of being born in Africa of African parents, were seen as integrated into the Portuguese colonial society, acting and behaving in a way that the Portuguese administration considered acceptable. More pertinent for the purpose of this study is that fact that all the other marriages registered in the *Livro de Casamentos* were between free people. In Benguela, marriage in the Catholic Church was limited to free people, and only rarely were those who were freed from an enslaved condition married in the Church. Unlike other regions in the Portuguese empire, slaves faced difficulties in making their marriages public and "legitimate" in the eyes of the Portuguese colonial society.[48]

Curiously, when comparing the marital records with baptisms, a different picture emerges. The baptismal records from 1797–1805 revealed that some enslaved women married. It is curious to note that the legitimate children of slave couples were registered during the 1797–1805 period when no record of enslaved people getting married was located in the parish of *Nossa Senhora do Pópulo*. Between 1797 and 1804, eleven children born to enslaved mothers were baptized as legitimate, suggesting that the parents had been married in the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate marriage books before 1806, thus I cannot cross reference the baptism and marriage information for the period before 1806. After 1806, however, the records suggest that only free people married in the Catholic Church in Benguela. The few books available indicate that marriage at the Catholic Church was not easy and accessible for everyone. Only the economic and social elite of Benguela looked for Church recognition of their relationships, while the majority of the poor and enslaved population carried on with their family lives. They baptized their children, but avoided legalizing their relationship in the eyes of the Portuguese colonial state.

The data from the Livro de Casamento of Benguela also revealed that women classified as *filhas naturais*, that is from a couple not married, did not have trouble finding suitable partners in Benguela. Thirty-two women, out of 152 cases, were classified as *naturais*. One of them, Dona Felizarda de Nazareth, originally from Luanda, was already widowed by the time she married Bernardo Jose de Oliveira, from Braga in Portugal.[49]

Marriage records also raise interesting questions about color classification in Benguela in the nineteenth century. It becomes clear that those classified as *pardos* faced different opportunities, including marriage options, which could offer greater social mobility. Sheila Farias argues that in Brazil, *pardos* baptized their children and married in

[48] Robert Slenes, *Na Senzala uma flor: esperanças e recordações na formação da família escrava. Brasil sudeste, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999); Guedes, *Egressos do Cativeiro*, 145–152.

[49] ABL, Livro de Casamentos, 1806–1853, fl. 36v, 21 August 1830,

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the Catholic Church.[50] While three women were classified as blacks (*pretas*) in Benguela (two of them were freed women), two were *parda* (and both of them were freed), and 147 were married without any notation of their skin color. It appears that priests preferred to ignore the racial classification of women, particularly those who married to foreign traders and colonial officers. As Elizabeth Kuznesof stressed for seventeenth and eighteenth century Mexico, the skin color or ethnicity of women was not recorded, perhaps allowing them and their descendants to assume the skin color of their spouses, who were likely to be better positioned socially and economically.[51] Thus, a free African woman who married a colonial officer or a trader in Benguela was usually listed without any reference to her skin color. References to color were restricted to poor women or women who married men of lower social standards, such as the few *pardas* and *pretas* explored earlier.

Yet, it is not clear in the records who were the *pardos* in Benguela. And, once again, I look for inspiration in the historiography about slavery in Brazil to understand events in West Central Africa. In the Brazilian context, Hebe Mattos has argued that *pardo* acquired a new meaning in nineteenth century with the increase of the number of free blacks in Rio de Janeiro. *Pardo* came to refer to all non-white people who were born free, thus differentiating them from the freed population, who carried the stigma of slavery. Bert Barickman and Douglas Libby, however, have shown that there were enslaved *pardos* in Bahia and in Minas Gerais, respectively.[52] A new generation of scholars, such as Roberto Guedes and Larissa Viana, are showing how color classification was flexible in the nineteenth-century Brazil, and the same person could be recorded as white, *pardo*, or black in different set of documents.[53] Skin color classification revealed more about social perceptions, wealth, and family connections, than an individual's actual skin color. In the case of the parish records of Benguela, *pardo* was a skin color restricted to free people and only rarely used to designate the enslaved population. Between 1794–1814, 171 children were classified as *pardo*, most of them free or freed Benguela residents. On one or two occasions pardo was used as

[50] Farias, *A Colônia em Movimento*, 305–306.

[51] Kuznesof, "Ethnic and Gender Influences."

[52] Hebe Mattos, "A Escravidão Moderna no quadro do Império Português: o Antigo Regime em Perspectiva Atlântica," in: João Luís Ribe Fragoso, Maria Fernanda Bicalho and Maria de Fátima Gouvêa (eds.), *O Antigo Regime nos Trópicos: A dinâmica imperial portuguesa, séculos XVI–XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2001), 141–162; Bert J. Barickman, "Reading the 1835 Parish Censuses from Bahia: Citizenship, Kinship, Slavery, and Household in Early Nineteenth-Century Brazil," *The Americas* 59–3 (2003), 287–323; Libby, "Notarized and Baptismal Manumissions."

[53] Guedes, *Egressos do cativeiro*; Larissa Viana, *O idioma da mestiçagem: as irmandades de pardos na América portuguesa* (Campinas SP [Brasil]: Editora Unicamp, 2007).

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the color classification of an enslaved person. In 1800, the priest baptized Jacinta and registered her as a *parda* enslaved girl. Her mother, Teresa, was black.[54] The other *parda* enslaved girl, was Maria, who was freed on her baptism. Both girls labeled as *pardas* belonged to the same slave owner, Antonio do Campos Trovão, and in both cases, the names of their fathers was unknown, suggesting that Trovão himself had fathered children with his slaves.[55] So, before 1814, *parda* was a term associated with former slaves, never with free people. Three decades later, *parda* continued to be a common term in Benguela. For example, of the 1,998 people baptized in Benguela between 1846 and 1849, only one was listed as *parda* – Eugenia, an adult woman from Bihe in the interior of Benguela, was classified as a free *parda*.[56] Perhaps she spoke some Portuguese and behaved in a way that the priest considered "civilized." Unlike her, most of those baptized between 1846 and 1848 were listed without any reference to color. By 1880, the term *pardo* was not used in the 119 baptism recorded. Thirty-three mothers were classified as blacks and three as *gentia*, or heathen. And in 82 cases, there was no reference to skin color.[57]

In the end, parish records, censuses, and other documents that registered color classification revealed more about the people who collected the information than those who were labeled with a particular racial description. More than designating skin color, *pardo* in Angola indicated a cultural mixing, where people were inserted into the colonial world as traders and colonial administrators, such as *capitão-mores* and the *donas,* giving shape to a culturally mixed society that blended Portuguese and local values from the Ndombe and others.[58] The meaning of *pardo* and racial classification in Benguela deserves attention, and it is important to stress the role of these documents in creating and assigning identifiers to people, in the past as well as in the present, when scholars engage with this historical evidence.

Death Records and the Study of African Lives

Another set of ecclesiastical data were information about women is available is the burial records. As with baptisms and marriages, deaths were also counted and recorded in Benguela. So far, four burial record books have been identified for the town of Benguela:

[54] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1794–1814, fl. 134, 27 October 1800.

[55] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1794–1814, fl. 280v, 23 December 1810.

[56] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1846–1849, fl. 165, 22 September 1848.

[57] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Batismo, 1880.

[58] Jill R. Dias, "Novas Identidades Africanas em Angola no Contexto do comércio Atlântico," in: Cristina Bastos, Miguel Vale de Almeida and Bela Feldman-Bianco (eds.), *Trânsitos Coloniais: Diálogos Críticos Luso-Brasileiros*, (Lisbon: Imprensa da Ciências Sociais, 2002), 293–320; Heywood, "Portuguese into African;" Reginaldo, *Os Rosários dos Angolas*, 54–55.

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Priests usually, recorded a full set of personal information in the burial records, including the full name of the dead person, the date of death, place of origin, status (free, enslaved, or freed), the sacraments the dead person had received, their place of residence and death, burial location, and the signature of the priest. In some records, the recorded information might provide further detail, for instance the parents' names, skin color, marital status, spouse's name, slaveholder's name in the case of enslaved or freed people, and cause of death. The economic standing was implicit in such expressions as "with a will," with a solemn will, or poor. In some cases, which also related to property control and social status, there were references to brotherhoods and occupations, particularly if the deceased was a colonial officer or military personnel.

Detailed burial record indicated the deceased's social and economic position. For example, when the Portuguese born José António Marques died, the priest registered:

> On 20 September 1773, in this town of São Filipe de Benguela, in the Nossa Senhora do Pópulo parish, was buried the body of José António Marques. From Lisboa, baptized in the parish of São Nicolau, the legitimate son of Manoel Marques, who is already deceased, and of Teresa Maria [no reference if the mother was alive or not]. Married in Recife in Pernambuco [Brazil] with Teresa Maria do Monte do Carmo Ribeira. José António Marques died with all the sacraments and with a will. He was declared to have two legitimate children, both alive. The oldest is called Maria Bernarda, and the second is José Vieira Marques, both declared his heirs. He declared José Vieira de Araújo as his will executor. His body should be clothed in the brotherhood vestments that he belonged to in Luanda [not clear which one] and in the absence of that clothing, his body should be covered in sheets and carried in and laid in the crypt of the Santo António de Catagirona brotherhood, to which he belonged. The priest prepared his body, put on a crucifix, and José António Marques was buried within the grounds of the church; in an area outside, by the church grounds, close to the altar of Our Lady of St. Ana. On the day of his death, and in the following days, masses were prayed on the name of his soul, until the seventh day.[59]

As this case shows, deceased men received a lot of attention. The priest in charge of the record detailed the family life and the wishes of the person buried. The same attention was not paid to women. Even in the case of important women, such as the wife of the governor of Benguela, the priest provided much less information. Ana Guilhermina Brissae Ferreira, who died in 1861, was not fully described despite being the wife of the governor. The lack of attention in this case might be linked to the fact that Ana

[59] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Óbito, 1770-1796, fl. 26v, 20 September 1773.

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Table 3. Burial Records of the parish of Nossa Senhora do Pópulo in Benguela

Dates	Number of registers
1770–1796	1,095
1797–1831	1,365
1858–1868	592
1874–1876	89
TOTAL	**3,143**

Guilhermina was not Catholic. She was probably Protestant, since she never received any sacrament, indicating she was not baptized.

> On 26 April 1861, in this town of Benguela, died D. Ana Guilhermina Brissae Ferreira, white, 44 years old, natural de Isle of Wight, England, daughter of George Guilherme Brissae and Mariana Brissae. She was married to the captain of the Portuguese Army, currently the governor of this district, João António das Neves Ferreira. She did not have a will nor did she receive any Catholic sacrament. She was buried at the general cemetery.[60]

In the case of an enslaved woman, the registry entry was even shorter:

> On 12 May 1806 died Catarina, slave of Francisco Teixeira, a black man, who lives in this town. She was buried in the main church [of Benguela].[61]

These records reveal how status social affected the burial records. Despite the brevity, such records provide much needed information on the enslaved and poor population, who were usually invisible in other types of documents.

Burial records reveal the possibility of studying age, gender, and cause of mortality among the free and unfree populations, as well as exploring the cultural practices related to death.[62] Similarly to the baptism and marriage records, there are a series of problems with the burial records. First, they are uneven on the number of people registered (as Table 3 indicates). Second, there are important gaps in the records available, with no burial record book located for the 1831–1858 period, a moment of profound shifts in Benguela associated with changes in the

[60] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Óbito, 1858–1868, fl. 29–29v, 26 April 1861.

[61] ABL, Benguela, Livro de Óbito, 1797–1831, fl. 50, 30 May 1806.

[62] A great example of what can be done with burial records is: Reis, *Death Is a Festival.*

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transatlantic slave trade.[63] Third, as the passages above demonstrate, the data is better detailed for the male free population than for the enslaved people. Fourth, only those buried on the colonial cemetery, initially located around the Nossa Senhora do Pópulo, received attention from the local priests. It is not clear what happened to those who died when there were no priests available or to those who did not receive a Catholic burial.

Ecclesiastical data is also available for places in the interior of Benguela, such as the Portuguese fortresses of Caconda and Quilengue, as well as Dombe Grande, and detailed study of these sets of documents will provide much needed information to reconstruct the lives of ordinary people in the urban center of West Central Africa.

Conclusion

As Africanists are well aware, writing a gendered history of African societies before the twentieth century is challenge and in most cases, primary sources are not available. The case of West Central Africa is different due to the fact that written sources were produced by Portuguese agents beginning in the late fifteenth century, particularly to the regions close to the coast.[64] Historians are also aware that African women's experiences are not documented easily, particularly for periods before the twentieth century, yet some pioneer studies have shown that missionaries and travelers registered women's experience, despite a series of biases and limitations.[65] Written evidence before the twentieth century tended to be elaborated by European men, who were not concerned with the ordinary lives of Africans, and less so, with the experiences of African women.

[63] For more on this, see: William G. Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants, and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840–1926* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Aida Freudenthal, *Arimos e fazendas: a transição agrária em Angola, 1850–1880* (Luanda: Chá de Caxinde, 2005); Roquinaldo Ferreira, "A supressão do tráfico de escravos em Angola (ca. 1830–ca. 1860)," *História Unisinos* 15–1 (2011), 3–13; Roquinaldo Ferreira, "Abolicionismo versus Colonialismo: Rupturas e Continuidades em Angola (século XIX)," in: Roberto Guedes (ed.), *África. Brasileiros e Portugueses, Séculos XVI–XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad, 2013), 95–112.

[64] For more on this, see: Beatrix Heintze, "Written Sources and African History: A Plea for the Primary Source. The Angola Manuscript Collection of Fernão de Sousa," *History in Africa* 9 (1982), 77–103; Heintze, *Angola nos séculos XVI e XVII*; John Thornton, "Early Kongo-Portuguese Relations: A New Interpretation," *History in Africa* 8 (1981), 183–204; Joseph C. Miller and John K. Thornton, "A crônica como fonte, história e hagiografia: o catálogo dos governadores de Angola," *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos* 12–13 (1990), 9–55.

[65] For more on this, see: Wright, "Women in Peril;" Nancy R. Hunt, "Placing African Women's History and Locating Gender," *Social History* 14–3 (1989), 359–379; David L. Schoenbrun, "Gendered Histories between the Great Lakes: Varieties and Limits," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29–3 (1997), 461–492.

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Despite the limitations in the sources, some studies have start addressing the economic and spiritual roles of women in Africa before the twentieth century. In order to write a more gender-inclusive history, Africanists can look for inspiration in the studies of Latin Americanists who have made extensive use of parish records to recover part of the experiences of the impoverished, enslaved, and excluded social actors. In the case of West Central Africa, due to the long history of Portuguese presence, this is possible. Colonial documents, such as population lists, slave registers, and production reports, registered the presence of African women in the early colonial centers. Ecclesiastic records provide much information on actors who can remain invisible in the West Central African past, such as slaves or poor urban residents.

Parish records are not perfect and present the same kinds of limitations as other primary sources, requiring reading against the grain and other epistemological exercises that historians need to employ.[66] For the purpose of writing a social history of Benguela, however, they provide a wealth of information on the local, non-white population, as well as for groups who tend to be marginalized in other sets of primary sources, such as slaves and women. Baptism, marriage, and burial records are full of references to African women and their social networks and provide many clues for historians who aim to produce an engendered analysis of the past. As with other sets of sources, the better detailed records concern the free population who lived in the colonial urban center, yet much information was recorded about the poor, the petty traders, and the common men and women who lived in early colonial centers in West Central Africa.

We might never know how many women were omitted from these sources, in the same way we might emphasize the importance of those who actively pursue Catholic sacraments at the expense of those who ignored or avoided the Portuguese, as well as the Catholic missionaries. The risk is to overemphasize the importance of Catholicism or simply assume that participation in Catholic sacraments equated erasing other religious experiences.[67] Even for those Africans who had their lives recorded, the information is fragmented and restricted to religious

[66] An important collection of essays discuss how to locate women in different types of collections, see: Chaudhuri *et al.*, *Contesting Archives*. For more on archives and the invisibility of certain social groups, see: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); Natalie Z. Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Ann L. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2 (2002), 87–109.

[67] For more on this, see: James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 4–6; Kananoja, "Healers, Idolaters, and Good Christians," 443–465.

sacraments, limiting the historical reconstruction of their lives. Parish records are not perfect sources, but in combination with other historical evidence, they provide historians with clues about social networks and family links, with are important in any attempt to write social histories. In the case of Benguela, for example, they allowed me to include women in the African past going beyond the merchant elite. The records also provoke several questions that deserve more attention in the West Central African past, such as understanding marriage choices, racial classifications, social mobility, and the thin line between slavery and freedom, among others. The records might also help us to understand how African men and women built their families, established social networks, and created new kinships and identities in pre-twentieth century West Central Africa.

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