

The Rise Of A New Consciousness: Early Euro-African Voices of Dissent in Colonial Angola

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Abstract

Events such as the 1820 Liberal Revolution in Portugal and the 1822 declaration of independence in Brazil appeared to the Creole elite based in the coastal centers of Portuguese West Africa as the prelude to a new socio-political order. Moreover, the arrival of hundreds of political refugees and convicts in Angola - from Brazil as well as from Europe - during the decade of 1820-30 helped considerably in spreading revolutionary ideas on that side of the Atlantic Ocean, fueling the hopes and aspirations of a society in which individuals or families were exposed to sudden and at times unpredictable alterations of their social status - often more than once in a lifetime, as the cases of Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo and Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses would seem to confirm.

This paper focuses on these two paradigmatic figures who embodied the discontent that spread among Luanda and Benguela traders and who confronted the authorities as nobody else dared to do in order to defend the interests of a Euro-African elite that, already during the first half of the 19th century, was struggling for more power and was progressively assuming an attitude suggestive of some kind of economic nationalism.

Keywords

Angola, 19th century, Creole elite, liberal ideals, dissent.

Resumo

A revolução liberal de 1820 em Portugal e a declaração de independência no Brasil em 1822 foram acontecimentos vistos pela elite crioula implantada nas regiões costeiras da África Ocidental como um prelúdio para uma nova ordem política e social.

Entre 1820 e 1830, com a chegada de centenas de refugiados políticos a Angola, provenientes do Brasil e da Europa, foi facilitada a difusão das ideias liberais, circunstância que trouxe algum alento a uma sociedade onde o percurso de muitos dos seus membros se tornava, por vezes imprevisível como aconteceu com homens como Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo e Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses.

Este artigo focaliza precisamente estas duas figuras paradigmáticas que personificaram o descontentamento vivido pelos comerciantes de Luanda e Benguela, os quais confrontavam as autoridades na defesa dos interesses de uma elite euro-africana.

Palavras-chave

- Angola, século XIX, elite crioula, ideais liberais, discórdia.

During the first half of the 19th century, Angolan society was characterized by the presence of a semi-urbanized commercial and administrative elite of Portuguese-speaking Creole families - white, black, some of mixed race, some Catholic and others Protestant, some long-established and others cosmopolitan - who were mainly based in the coastal towns of Luanda and Benguela. As well as their wealth, derived from the functions that they performed in the colonial administrative, commercial and customs apparatus, their European-influenced culture and habits clearly distinguished them from the broad population of black African peasants and farm workers. In order to expand its control over the region, Portugal desperately needed the support of this kind of non-colonizing urban elite, which was also used as an assimilating force, or better as a source for the dissemination of a relevant model of social behavior. Thus, great Creole merchants and inland chiefs dealt in captive slaves, bound for export to Brazil: the tribal aristocracy and the Creole bourgeoisie thrived on the profits of overseas trade and used them to live in style, consuming large quantities of imported alcoholic beverages and wearing fashionable European clothes.

The suppression of the slave trade, however, put an end to this situation of mutual advantage and altered forever more the relationship between colonizers and the so-called *sons of the country*.

In order to understand and contextualize the specificity of the subsequent opposition to the colonial regime put forward by the local Creole elite, it is necessary to retrace the events which unfolded in the Portuguese-speaking world during the 19th century, taking into account different moments of rupture or external influences, together with the most important channels of cultural dissemination of the time. It has to be recognized that the cultural identity of this particular social group strongly relied on metropolitan or Brazilian models in both their forms and contents, but it would be superficial to claim that the cultural imaginary formed in Angola during this period of time totally lacked any original or peculiar features.

On the other hand, how could people's ways of thinking fail to be influenced by the ideological origins of the revolutions that had been taking place in Europe and America since the late 18th century? Events such as the 1820 Liberal Revolution in Portugal and the 1822 declaration of independence in Brazil appeared as the prelude to a new socio-political order and the arrival of hundreds of political refugees and convicts during the decade of 1820-30, from Brazil as well as from Europe, considerably helped in spreading revolutionary ideas¹. The political debate was fueled by journals and pamphlets mainly originating in Brazil but, on the

¹ On the question of the potentially subversive influence of political criminals, see also *Ofício do Governador*, AHU, Angola, 27/03/1821, cx. 140, *Ofício do Governador Castel Branco*, 18/11/1824, doc. 145, cx. 146 and 19/10/1825, cx. 149-A.

other hand, the most conservative aspects of Portuguese liberalism were strongly and officially emphasized in Angola because of the constant fear of a possible social and political uprising.

As a matter of fact, the two personalities to whom this article is dedicated suffered systematic persecution at the hands of the Portuguese authorities and their tormented lives are evidence of the trials awaiting those who decided to assume a critical attitude towards the colonial establishment. On the one hand, we have a former convict born on the periphery of the empire, who had adventurously managed to climb the social ladder and become a serious threat to the establishment. On the other hand, we have the scion of a noble Luanda family who, thanks to the education received in Europe and his long-term experience in diverse fields of colonial administration, breathed life into a revolutionary project that sought to achieve progressive autonomy for his country. Arsénio de Carpo's life and Carvalho e Meneses' work perfectly represent both the spirit of the Creole elite and all its contradictions, providing a privileged starting point for better understanding and contextualizing it, focusing our attention on a society in which family, business or social links acquired a special value. In mid-19th century Angola, a good deal or a good position, for instance, often depended on these links, and individuals or families were exposed to sudden, and at times unpredictable, alterations of their social status. This often occurred more than once in a lifetime, as the cases of Arsénio Pompeu de Carpo and Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses would seem to confirm.

Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo

Perfectly embodying the discontent that had spread among the traders of Luanda and Benguela, Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo emerged as a paradigmatic figure, never keeping quiet and confronting the authorities as nobody else dared to do in order to defend the interests of a Euro-African elite that, already during the first half of the 19th century, was struggling for more power and progressively assuming an attitude suggestive of some kind of economic nationalism. Already in 1853, for instance, he publicly invited the people of Angola to stand up for their right to emancipate themselves from Portugal².

An insightful and adventurous man, he became not only an opulent trader, but also a prominent public personality in the colony. He published a series of pamphlets concerning politics and personal matters and a collection of poems³, later regarded as a fundamental point of reference by the ensuing generations of dissatisfied *sons of the country*. Moreover, from his numerous contributions to metropolitan newspapers, it is possible to establish his political profile, the causes he defended on behalf of the social group which adopted him and the reasons why colonial authorities considered him a threat to public order and metropolitan monopolistic and centralizing interests.

² Pacheco (1992-94). Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo, uma Vida de Luta contra as Prepotencias do Poder Colonial em Angola. In *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, Nos. 16-17. Lisbon: IICT, p. 51.

³ Entitled *Dedo de Pygmeu - Pygmy's finger - CARPO* (1843). *Dedo de Pygmeu*. Lisbon: author's edition, J. J. Andrade e Silva, Arsénio de Carpo's literary effort would be republished in 1887 by the Luanda newspaper *O Futuro de Angola*, providing an example and a reference for the following generations of Creoles who were dissatisfied with the colonial regime.

Nonetheless, Arsénio de Carpo's life also represents the rise and fall of one of Luanda's last great slave traders, showing the unsteadiness of such a position in the aftermath of abolition. Highly dependent on a successful transcontinental network, Arsénio de Carpo struggled throughout his life to achieve and maintain a privileged status, an embodiment of the ambiguity of the Creole elite. At that time, in fact, recourse to liberal ideals was often motivated by the fear of losing advantages granted by exposure to European culture and the individual quest for personal interest often omitted the public interest. It is not by chance that Arsénio de Carpo's main biographers, Carlos Pacheco and João Pedro Marques, provided two totally opposite versions of this figure, bringing back to life, on the one hand, a freedom-fighting hero agitating for the emergence of a new country and, on the other hand, a reckless and fallacious slave trader.

Born in Funchal in 1792, Arsénio was the son of illiterate and unfortunate emigrants, who were forced to return to Madeira after a failed attempt to make a fortune in Brazil; he soon started to work as a mason, like his father, but in 1817 he was arrested in Lisbon for joining the plot led by Gomes Freire de Andrade⁴.

Embarking for Rio de Janeiro in 1820, he changed his surname - Santos - to the rather grandiloquent Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo, probably borrowing it from a play he had seen at the theatre, a juvenile passion. Deeply fascinated by Roman sonorities and connotations, Arsénio loved to boast of his presumed classical erudition by quoting Latin authors or evoking personalities such as Titus or Nero. However, his choice of names also denotes a touch of megalomania, evidence of his need to stand out, and it can be considered as the first step towards a career based on self-promotion⁵.

Already branded as "one of the most indomitable *sans culottes* of his time"⁶, Arsénio returned to his native island where, in 1823, he was arrested and condemned to five years' exile in Angola for evoking British protection in the event of a secession of Madeira from Portugal and for his incendiary words and sarcastic remarks on the monarchy, the Church and the saints.

Arsénio initially appealed to have his sentence commuted, hoping to serve his imprisonment in a more welcoming location such as Cape Verde, but he eventually decided to withdraw his appeal⁷. According to João Pedro Marques, he was probably persuaded by the

⁴ The Portuguese general Gomes Freire de Andrade (1757-1817) was accused of being the head of a liberal plot against the absolute monarchy. Since the royal family and the Court had fled to Brazil in 1807, the king João VI was represented in continental Portugal by a British military government led by William Carr Beresford. Freire de Andrade was arrested for treason and hanged together with eleven other plotters. Lord Beresford's brutal methods unleashed protests and intensified anti-British feelings in the country, eventually leading to the Revolution of 1820.

⁵ Azevedo (1873). *As saudades da terra: Historia das ilhas do Porto-Sancto, Madeira, Desertas e Selvagens*. Funchal: Typographia Funchalense, p. 806.

⁶ *Biografia ou vida publica de Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo* (Rio de Janeiro: n.p., 1846), p. 7. Anonymous biography attributed by João Pedro Marques to Luís António Carvalho de Castro. MARQUES (2001). Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo: um percurso negreiro no século 19. In *Análise Social*, vol. xxxvi, No. 160. Lisbon: Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa, p. 612.

⁷ MARQUES 2001: 613.

prospect of getting rich quickly through activities related to the slave trade in Angola. Moreover, his decision could also have been influenced by his network of Freemason acquaintances⁸.

Following Arsénio's movements can also shed some light on a form of association about which little is known, as far as Angola is concerned. We know for certain that he joined the *Caridade* (Charity) lodge, which had been active in Luanda since 1837⁹. The origins of this lodge are mysterious, since it is almost impossible to untangle the intricate web of sects and affiliations which appeared in the Portuguese-speaking world during that period. According to Oliveira Marques, the *Caridade* lodge could have been subordinated to the *Oriente Passos Manuel* lodge based in Porto, as well as to a Brazilian branch of the *Grande Oriente* lodge: in any case, it should not be confused with the *Caridade Lusitana* lodge, established in Luanda in 1844 as a branch of the *Grande Oriente Lusitano Unido* (GOLU), one of the oldest Grand Lodges in the world, founded in 1802¹⁰.

It seems unlikely that Arsénio de Carpo became a freemason in Portugal, which he left for Angola in 1824, later to return, once again as a prisoner, only in 1845. In his biography dedicated to Arsénio de Carpo, Carlos Pacheco is inclined to think that he received his initiation in jail, but Brazil is another possible option, since at least until 1834 Dom Miguel's temporary return to the throne compelled a significant number of Portuguese liberals to flee to Rio de Janeiro. Dom Miguel, the brother of the abdicated king Pedro IV, had returned from exile to claim the throne in 1828. As pressure mounted for a return to absolutism, Miguel dissolved the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Peers and summoned the traditional *Cortes* of the three estates of the realm to proclaim his accession to absolute power. The *Cortes* proclaimed him king and nullified the Constitutional Charter granted by Pedro two years earlier. This usurpation did not go unchallenged by the liberals, but Miguel suppressed any rebellion and many thousands of political opponents were either arrested or fled abroad. There followed five years of repression.

Of all the contingents of this Diaspora, freemasons certainly belonged to the category of people most persecuted by the Crown and the Church¹¹. It is probably in this context - and thanks to his friend Tomás Tolentino da Silva, a cleric at Funchal cathedral and an angry liberal and freemason - that Arsénio became acquainted with freemasonry in general and with the group of Portuguese dissidents who printed the periodical *Gazeta Estrela* in particular. This publication had been known in Angola since the 1820s, but it had to be read under cover because of the measures taken by the Miguelist Governor-General Nicolau de Abreu Castelo Branco, who had outlawed it "for referring irreverently to His Majesty the King and to the highest Portuguese authorities (...) and for inciting subversive elements to unleash disorder"¹².

⁸ PACHECO (1993). *Leituras e Bibliotecas de Angola na Primeira Metade do Século 19 - Subsídios de uma Primeira Tentativa de Abordagem*. In *Vértice*, serie II, No. 55. Lisbon, Ed. Caminho, p. 80.

⁹ *Papéis do Marquês de Sá da Bandeira, Carta de 1844 para aquele Marquês*, sender unknown, AHU, Angola, room 12, folder 827, 1844.

¹⁰ See OLIVEIRA MARQUES (1986). *Dicionário de Maçonaria Portuguesa*, vol. I. Lisbon: Editorial Delta, col. 271.

¹¹ PACHECO 1992-94: 79.

¹² PACHECO 1993: 89. However, the situation changed after the liberals' definitive victory: Pompeu de Carpo came back to Angola, raised a fortune through more or less licit traffic and, when he decided to stand as a candidate to represent Angola at the *Cortes* in 1845, he was able to count on the support of the

During his imprisonment, Arsénio de Carpo served in the army¹³, but, at the end of the 1820s, his military career was cut short by the Governor-General Castelo Branco and he became an innkeeper. Back then, in Angola, this was a logical choice for a political exile: inns were privileged gathering places where business, politics and plots were discussed. New ideas were spreading through Angola after the success of the liberal revolutions in Europe and South America and the local imaginary was being invaded by a heady desire for freedom. During the years following the independence of Brazil in 1822, soldiers and residents were often accused by the authorities of supporting “revolutionaries”, a general term used to define liberals who were organized into Masonic lodges and desired the unification of Angola and Brazil.

Contacts between innkeepers and slave traders were frequent, since *aguardente* was Angola’s main import to be exchanged in the inland regions for slaves. Arsénio probably also worked as a representative for a well-established trader between 1826 and 1830, the years encompassing the signing of the treaty between Britain and Brazil for the abolition of the slave trade and its coming into force. Aware of the fact that Angola had fallen on hard times, slave traders tried to exploit this period to their utmost before leaving for Brazil.

It seems that Arsénio followed the trend: after serving his ban and after being imprisoned again because of some sonnets mocking the governor’s authority, he left Luanda bound for Recife, Brazil. At least until the 1840s, Angolan and Brazilian oligarchies traded almost exclusively among themselves, and Pernambuco, a territory located in the Brazilian Northeast, was the main marketplace dealing with Luanda.

After spending some years in Brazil and in the United States, Arsénio returned to Angola in 1837, where he started working for the slave trader Francisco Teixeira de Miranda – also known as Mirandinha. Arsénio’s main activities consisted in buying goods in America and distributing them to his agents¹⁴, who traveled to the inland regions and exchanged them for slaves. Arsénio organized the export of these slaves to Brazilian markets, relying on a network of front men who signed record books and documentation on his behalf, thus keeping his name unblemished¹⁵. It was certainly a risky activity: the transient nature of such a profession was basically explained by the fact that slave traders, officially outlawed, were often no longer able to secure their business simply by bribing the authorities or buying the silence of greedy or ambitious associates.

However, by the time of his return to Luanda, Arsénio was an accomplished and wealthy cosmopolitan, creating a sensation in the capital for the sophisticated luxury he liked to

barons of Portuguese politics and masonry – leading Septembrist figures such as Sá da Bandeira – and his British correspondents, such as the Tory, Lord Aberdeen. Pompeu de Carpo’s alternating fortunes allow us to understand the evolution of freemasonry in Portugal from the status of a persecuted breeding ground for dissidence during the civil war period into one of the arms of institutional power after the liberals took over.

¹³ The decree, issued on 12 February, 1676, obliging all fit convicts to serve in the colonial army remained in force until 1869.

¹⁴ The agents leading those expeditions were called *aviados* or *pumbeiros*. Often traders’ sons or relatives, *aviados* could be white, mulatto, free black or “civilized” slave intermediaries, while, according to colonial terminology, *pumbeiros* were “shoeless blacks”.

¹⁵ Arsénio used to brag about his cunning system in the texts that he published. CARPO (1846). *Resposta à Refutação Antecedente*. Lisbon: n.p., pp. 64-65.

display. In fact, even though the suppression of the transatlantic traffic had been a serious blow to Luanda traders, instead of renouncing their luxurious lifestyles, they tended to turn luxury into a powerful social weapon that, at the same time, allowed them to both confront the central government and obtain respect or at least recognition from the colonial authorities. Arsénio de Carpo, as this letter from a British emissary seems to confirm, paved the way: “The only slave trader that I met in Angola lived there as a prince. That was a professional necessity, rather than a matter of extravagance or natural bent for luxury. A slave trader basically depends on authorities’ tolerance and benevolence: the only way to attract powerful friends is to act as a magnate, being generous, holding parties and gatherings. It’s not different from a diplomat’s life” (Perry Eardley-Wilmot 1853: 7).

Anyway, by the end of the 1830s, the Portuguese government was to undertake the first serious effort aimed at ending slave smuggling. The consequence was an inevitable clash with Luanda families involved in the traffic. Arsénio de Carpo, elected as interim president of the Luanda Municipal Council in 1837, rapidly became their leader.

Taking advantage of his literary skills, he wrote several times to Lisbon asking for the Governor-General António de Noronha’s head and for the perpetuation of the traffic, accusing “overzealous ministers and ill-informed councillors” of unleashing the abolitionist storm over Angola, instigated by their grim British allies¹⁶. His point was that an abrupt application of the abolitionist law would have been equal to a death sentence for Portugal, Spain and Brazil.

Already in his seventies and unable to bear the pressure, António de Noronha resigned: slave traders gained some time and Arsénio de Carpo rose to the top. Strongly backed by the Septembrist front, now in power, Arsénio de Carpo even pursued a career in politics, presenting himself as a candidate for both the senate and the *Cortes*, hoping – in vain – to be elected as the representative for Angola.

During this period, he also managed to supply British ships at the port of Luanda, generously offering his estates to influence British friends, who were apparently unaware of the fact that their man in Luanda was one of the last slave traders in the area. In 1848, he even traveled to London and paid homage to Queen Victoria. His purpose was to promote the creation of a Portuguese West Africa Company and to raise funds for the construction of a steam sawmill on the banks of the Kwanza river and a railway to connect Luanda to Calumbo¹⁷.

However, by the mid-1840s, Portugal could no longer tolerate ambiguities, trapped as it was between the persistent pressure exerted by Britain and France in order to achieve the full application of the decree abolishing the slave trade and the desperate need to affirm its authority in Africa. The Cabralist¹⁸ Governor-General Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha, who considered

¹⁶ *O Paquete do Ultramar* (Lisbon, 26/10/1839).

¹⁷ CARPO (1848). Projecto d’uma companhia para o melhoramento do Comercio, Agricultura e Industria na Província de Angola, que se deve estabelecer na cidade de São Paulo de Assumpção de Loanda... Lisbon: n.p.

¹⁸ In 1842, a military coup led by António Bernardo da Costa Cabral promulgated the restoration of the 1826 Constitutional Charter, abolished by the September Revolution in 1836. The Cabralist regime remained in power, with brief interruptions, until the Regeneration (1851). Cabralism is normally associated with the right wing of the liberal movement, while the previous regime – Septembrism – is usually associated with the left wing.

Arsénio de Carpo the greatest slave trader of the region and the colony's public enemy number one, expelled him as soon as he set foot in Angola¹⁹.

Arsénio de Carpo was therefore forced to move to Lisbon where, still backed by the Septembrist left-wing press and by freemasonry, he had the chance to maintain his standard of living²⁰. Cleared, for lack of evidence, of the accusation of slave trading and misusing his power as a member of the Luanda Municipal Council, he savored his triumph and posed a further menace to his Cabralist opponents by trying to put himself forward as a candidate for the position of Governor-General of Angola. In 1849, as soon as the Cabralist governor had left Angola, Arsénio de Carpo returned to Luanda, reestablished his network and then tried to do the same in Brazil. Unfortunately for him, during this period, the Brazilian empire also started to take appropriate disciplinary action in order to dismantle the slave trade. Arrested in Rio and expelled from the empire²¹, Arsénio returned to Luanda, discredited and financially ruined. Put on trial for insolvency, he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment on São Tomé Island.

Already approaching his sixties, Arsénio was convinced – as usual – that he was the victim of a political plot. Nonetheless, he was granted the chance to be transferred to Saint George's Castle, in Lisbon. After his conviction was revoked in 1853, he spent his last years desperately trying to restore his discredited reputation: he published the documentation attesting to his presumed innocence and made a living out of legal trading, but he never managed to rid himself of the tag of a slave smuggler²².

Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses

The offspring of a prominent family from Luanda, Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses shared with Arsénio de Carpo the same liberal idealism, the same powerful arch-enemies, and a tormented life in exile. While Arsénio de Carpo was basically an autodidact, however, Carvalho e Meneses' higher social standing granted him the chance to be educated in Lisbon and to come into contact with the intellectual trends sweeping across the metropolis during the 1820s, especially as far as the debate on national decadence was concerned. During that period, Portugal's objective difficulties in maintaining its colonial empire while ravaged by civil wars, constrained by a huge foreign debt and unable to attend to its population's basic needs gave rise to the first authoritative voices of internal dissent. Among others, the romantic

¹⁹ OLIVEIRA Mário António Fernandes de (1981). *Alguns Aspectos da Administração de Angola em Época de Reformas*. Lisbon: Edição da Universidade Nova de Lisboa, pp. 167-191 and OLIVEIRA Mário António Fernandes de (1997) [1985]. *A Formação da Literatura Angolana 1851-1950*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, pp. 27-42. "I hope this dangerous, restless and ambitious man will never set foot in the province of Angola again." *Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha a Falcão*, Reserved, 11/09/1845, ANTT, M.ne, cx. 386.

²⁰ Newspapers such as *O Patriota* and *A Revolução de Setembro* allowed him, in their pages, to wage his political and personal battles against the common enemy: Cabralism and its representatives in both Portugal and Angola.

²¹ Arsénio met the same fate as the two hundred Portuguese citizens who, after being expelled from Pernambuco, asked for permission to settle in Africa. Supported by the Portuguese crown, in 1849, they founded Moçâmedes, which rapidly became Angola's third largest coastal colonial centre.

²² *Boletim do Governo Geral da Província de Angola* (Luanda, 05/11/1853), pp. 4-5.

poet Almeida Garrett stigmatized the venality and inexperience of politicians, the profligacy of the court and the pretension of the country's aristocrats, while appealing to newly independent Brazil as a symbol of hope, youth, exuberance and energy²³. On the other hand, he was convinced that Portugal, and consequently its remaining overseas possessions, were suffering from an unrelenting decadence, basically caused by its disastrous policy of expansion²⁴.

Clearly influenced by Almeida Garrett, Carvalho e Meneses became the most important spokesman for the radical political views of the Creole community in Angola, pointing, in turn, to the rampant bribery and corruption, the ineptitude and arrogance of governors, badly chosen public functionaries, scandalous patronage and political intrigues as the main causes of post-abolition stagnation.

Prophetically, he also foresaw a gloomy future for the Portuguese empire, since he wrote: "No measures have been taken to prevent the rulers from facing people's righteous resentment towards violence, abuses and arrogance. But this resentment produces a kind of hatred that, when not quenched by acts of justice, passes from father to son and one day will irreparably lead to a general conflagration" (Carvalho e Meneses, 1848: 151).

After returning to Angola in 1823 to resume the post of public copyist and accountant (which he had previously held in Mozambique), Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses was dismissed and expelled by the Governor-General Nicolau Abreu Castelo Branco in 1829 because of his opposition to Dom Miguel's transient victory²⁵.

At the time of the liberal comeback, in 1834, Carvalho e Meneses recommended to the new metropolitan government the establishment of a clearer division between civil and military powers and later defended his principles and convictions as a deputy to the *Cortes* (1839-1841). To this end, he also wrote the *Geographical and Political Account of the Portuguese Dominions*, featuring a geographical and political description of the Kingdoms of Angola and Benguela and the origins of their decadence; an overall picture of the country and its resources; a series of suggestions about how to raise from misery a dominion that a beneficent and dynamic rule could make extremely profitable for Portugal.

The analysis of his thought is extremely important because Carvalho e Meneses introduced in a concise and direct style, without excessive frills or unnecessary rhetoric - and more than half a century in advance - all the themes, proposed solutions and claims that would later characterize the struggle by *Angolense* intellectuals at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century.

Above all, it is easy to isolate in his writing a proud sense of belonging to the Creole elite, celebrated in the exaltation of those individuals - or families - who had arrived from Europe at the beginning of the settlement process and who had managed to prosper despite the

²³ Almeida Garrett (1991) [1824-1827]. *Da Europa e da America e de sua Mutua Influência na Causa da Civilização e da Liberdade - Doutrinação da Sociedade Liberal*. Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, p. 84.

²⁴ Almeida Garrett 1991: 69.

²⁵ From 1826 to 1834, Portuguese society was shaken by the *Liberal Wars*, fought between the Liberals, under Pedro IV, at times King of Portugal and Emperor of Brazil, and the Absolutists or *Miguelistas*, as they were called after their leader Dom Miguel (Pedro's brother). The Liberals supported a Constitutional Monarchy, while the Absolutists believed in Miguel's divine right to rule.

scant support that they received from the motherland. Nonetheless, this feeling was soon followed by one of growing pessimism, since it was clear that a flawed administration and management of the colony had definitely brought an end to the Creole elite's golden age: "But all that faded like smoke: in their great majority, the emissaries of power found that ignorant people were easier to control and this led to the progressive extinction of our reduced but nonetheless regular educational system. Anyway, the decadence of the colony was also induced by the anti-political method adopted to settle these territories" (Carvalho e Meneses 1848: 53-54).

Carvalho e Meneses was clearly referring to the institutionalized influx of common criminals into the colony. A convinced liberal, he supported the ideal of a wise government guaranteed by the Charter and could not tolerate the way in which "the few gifted native citizens remaining in the country have been excluded, through frivolous pretexts, invented crimes or false information, from military or civil posts, all to the good of a flock of birds of prey and ill omen." He was not afraid to mention among the major culprits the Miguelist Governor-General Nicolau de Abreu Castelo Branco, who had already suffered Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo's ruthless rebukes.

As far as the troubled transition from slave to free labor was concerned, his position was similar to that of Arsénio de Carpo: Portugal needed nothing more than slaves from Angola and therefore discouraged and opposed any other activity in the colony. But now that the traffic had been abolished, the locals were left with nothing²⁶. That was why Portugal's domination progressively came to be perceived as a burden in the coastal centers, and Carvalho e Meneses was then among the first to talk about decentralization, dreaming about the establishment of trading companies and denouncing the violence suffered by the natives: "Thanks to the progress of civilization and to the liberal institutions we are now enjoying, everybody is aware of the fact that the colonies can be linked to the metropolis through the establishment of relationships based on mutual commercial interest, without the inconveniences posed by a forced and heinous obedience which never really benefited Portugal (...) The remedy for decadence lies in the foundation and management of companies specializing in trade, agriculture and industry" (Carvalho e Meneses 1834: 29).

Considering the natives "idol worshippers rather than barbarians" and assuming that European civilization was totally unknown to them mainly because of the oppression and plundering perpetrated by the authorities, Carvalho e Meneses nonetheless expressed the ambiguous and instrumental sympathy for the "uncivilized" that was so typical among the Angolan Creole elite. Remunerated work and investment in education already appeared to him as viable solutions, in order both to win the natives' confidence and to obtain some profit from local activities: "It is necessary to bring civilization to the natives through methodical teaching; instead of trying to abruptly modify their customs and religious principles, since interest is the real motor of the human heart, it would be better to attract them by remunerating their services, accustoming them to work without resorting to violence and distracting them from fighting wars in which they end up enslaving each other" (Carvalho e Meneses 1848: 33).

²⁶ CARVALHO E MENESES, Intellectual mulato de Luanda replica a discurso de Sá da Bandeira. In *O Paquete do Ultramar*, No. 164, 18/01/1840, p. 657.

That was how, in his opinion, the British and Dutch managed to make profits from their dominions, supported as they were by agronomists, engineers, doctors, traders and assorted highly motivated technicians. He thought that the political administration of the colony could be improved by making some changes in the colonial hierarchy: a neat separation of powers, to be obtained through the election of a civil political authority that would then be assisted by a military authority, could facilitate the supervision of both public and military officials, while the appointment of an independent commissioner could effectively monitor both civil and military public issues. He urged the creation of a ministry entirely dedicated to the colonies, thereby eliminating the fragmentation of colonial affairs into different secretaries of state. He also pleaded for the abolition of the ivory monopoly and for a reform of the settlement and convict system, proposing that the compulsory draft should be limited to unskilled individuals who were unable to offer any contribution to local agriculture and industry.

In 1842, traveling back to Luanda on the warship *Amélia*, he was shipwrecked off the coast of Moçâmedes. He managed to reach Luanda, but the following year he was forced to return to Lisbon. The publication of his booklet did not pass unnoticed, but despite all adversity and spurred by emotional and personal involvement, Carvalho e Meneses rewrote and published an updated version of his work in Lisbon.

According to his claims, before he embarked on the warship *Amélia*, one of his many political opponents convinced the authorities that he was taking with him to Angola all that was necessary to set up a newspaper designed to spread subversive ideas of independence. It is true that Carvalho e Meneses owned a printing press, which he intended to ship to Angola, but a foreboding eventually induced him to get rid of such a dangerous piece of property by selling it to a former administrator of the National Typography. Unfortunately the *secret* police - as he referred to them - were not aware of this latest transaction and the order was given to prevent his ship from reaching the colony, whatever the cost.

Carvalho e Meneses took the opportunity to bitterly point out how his initial idea to introduce a printing press into Angola in order to contribute to the province's development was exploited in a rather different way by the Governor-General Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha: "Once appointed Governor-General, Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha immediately understood how important it was to control a printing press. He then ordered one, so that he could publish the acts of his dictatorship or brag about presumed marvelous improvements in the pages of official bulletins filled with elegies probably written by himself, while nobody is free to publish thoughts which are not in harmony with the lord of the land (...) Well, since freedom of the press is not prohibited overseas, no authority should be allowed to act like a censor and everybody should be free to print their ideas and complaints, as long as no abuse is committed of this right enshrined in the constitution. We agree that official bulletins should not report rebukes or complaints against the chief of the province or other authorities, but all the publications issued in the province are printed by the government and this cannot be tolerated" (Carvalho e Meneses 1848: 191).

To add insult to injury, at least until the 1970s, colonial propaganda celebrated Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha as the father of the printed press in Angola, a far-seeing governor who contributed to the progress of civilization.

According to Carvalho e Meneses, the constant rumors about independentist threats in the colony were also often imputable to the government authorities. His keenness for

the prosperity of his homeland was unquestionable, as was his loyalty to the Portuguese crown. His frustration was caused by the fact that the free exercise of the same rights that in Portugal constituted the pillars of a new socio-political order was undermined in Angola by harsh despotism. And as far as the chance to achieve independence is concerned, he was firmly convinced that nobody would have dared to make an attempt at achieving what was considered totally impossible. *Independence*, in fact, was the favorite word used to legitimate all injustices inflicted on overseas people, and especially on the natives. The constitution ensured political equality among all the monarchy's subjects, but to them these words were nothing more than "scratches on a piece of paper called Fundamental Law, torn off whenever it is convenient for the men in charge. The idea of independence does exist, it is true, but it only exists in the imagination of plotters or rulers such as Pedro Alexandrino da Cunha (...) it exists in the minds of those who hate the progress of civilization and demand blind, slave-like obedience. Such an inhuman kind of obedience runs contrary to the spirit of our century and therefore urges the people to revolt" (Carvalho e Meneses 1848: 152).

Conclusion

At this stage, it was indeed impossible to imagine a separatist movement in Angola. Conspiracy and subversive behavior mainly appealed to mestizo soldiers, legal practitioners, civil servants or trading agents. By fighting the authorities, they had less to lose in socio-economic terms than wealthy landlords or slave owners who, even if they were dissatisfied with Portuguese restrictions, were not disposed to provide the decisive support to promote a large-scale rebellion. That was why, in most cases, the few uprisings and riots which took place were directed more against unpopular governors than against Portugal²⁷. After all, the Portuguese, unable to efficiently patrol the coasts, did not pose any serious obstacles to the perpetration of clandestine slave-related activities, but nonetheless they could offer protection in the case of a native or slave rebellion, which was feared by Creole merchants as much as the loss of their business.

Many old Creole families simply decided to move to Brazil, and those who stayed still had to build up and hone their political perception, not to mention a new national identity.

Only in 1866 did the first non-official periodical publication appear in the colony. *A Civilização da África Portuguesa* (1866-1869), owned and run by António Urbano Monteiro de Castro, Alfredo Júlio Cortês Mântua and Francisco Pereira Dutra, was a weekly publication dedicated to the defense of local administrative, commercial, agricultural and industrial interests. Their articles also denounced the arrogance of metropolitan emissaries and stigmatized the abuses committed by colonial administrators. That was the starting point for the development of a journalistic activity that was destined to take root in Luanda and to rapidly increase over the following decades. Between 1866 and 1900, in fact, forty-six more periodical

²⁷ A clear example of this trend is provided by the riot that occurred in 1836: the Governor-General Domingos de Saldanha died suddenly and citizens gathered at the town hall to discuss the formation of a provisional government. However, the widely hated and greatly feared leader of the infantry regiment, Commander Andrade, dissolved the Assembly and claimed power. The garrison troops immediately sided with the residents and eliminated Andrade. CARVALHO E MENESES (1848). *Demonstração Geographica...* Lisbon: Typographia Classica, p. 196.

titles were registered in the capital and their diversity testified to the existence of a rich cultural life with no equal anywhere else in Africa at the time²⁸. Those first rudimentary newspapers turned out to be the main vehicle for local literary proclivities: Luanda and Benguela rapidly became centers of lively cultural, social and political activity, hosting debates in which the ideals of the French revolution were openly supported, and developing an ever greater determination to achieve political autonomy from Portugal.

With the launch of the so-called 'free press period', the colony of Angola enjoyed a sort of intellectual euphoria: in this kind of journalism, exhibiting a taste for controversy and devoted to the defense of local values and interests, both the *sons of the country* and Creolized Portuguese found a way to express their heterogeneous positions not only about politics and trade, but also about art, culture and social criticism, and to uphold their economic and administrative interests against the arrogance shown by some governors, at variance with the most reductive metropolitan policies. The definition of a 'free press' is, of course, quite a rough one: it is more correct to say that settlers and locals tended to define as representing a 'free press' those publications that were issued by private printers, in order to distinguish them from the official government gazette. If it is true that a certain number of publications saw the light during this period, it is also true that their life was never easy, with the colonial censors being constantly on the alert.

Among the most active journalists and editors of the period, José de Fontes Pereira, Mamede Sant'Ana e Palma, Lino Maria de Sousa Araújo, José da Ressurreição Arantes Braga and, significantly, Arsénio de Carpo Júnior deserve a special mention for the many years that they devoted to this activity and for their painstaking efforts to keep their publications alive despite the troubled and often dangerous relationship between the local independent press and the colonial authorities. Whenever they were forced to halt either by the colonial authorities or by financial difficulties, these journalists would continue their struggle with a new title and a new publication, again presenting issues and concerns raised by Euro-African members of the colonial society.

In this way, the prominent themes introduced by Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses and Arsénio Pompílio Pompeu de Carpo during the first half of the 19th century (progress and education, social injustice, decentralization, autonomy, and open criticism of the colonial system) were taken up again by the following generations of the *sons of the country* and inspired a series of concrete proposals of autonomy - or even claims for independence - developed during the first decade of the 20th century by José de Macedo, António Joaquim de Miranda and António de Assis Júnior, or expressed in the anonymous collection of articles entitled *Voz de Angola clamando no deserto* (1901).

It is not by chance that José de Fontes Pereira, considered by many to be the doyen of modern Angolan nationalism, quoted Joaquim António de Carvalho e Meneses and the notorious episode of the "sunken printing press" in order to show how the presence of the Portuguese was substantially felt as a burden, hindering every kind of development in Angola: "aware of the power that such a skilled politician could deploy using a weapon [the printing

²⁸ Ervedosa, *Roteiro da Literatura Angolana* (1985) [1974]. Havana: União dos Escritores Angolanos, p. 28.

press] that is so dangerous to the interests of the metropolis, in Portugal they preferred to lose a warship rather than allow this engine of civilization to disembark in Luanda”²⁹.

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