

USES, REUSES AND ABUSES: CROSSING “BORDERS” AND “LUSO-AFRICANITIES” IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHIES OF ANGOLA, CAPE VERDE AND GUINEA-BISSAU FOR THE 15TH, 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES

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Introduction²

Portuguese navigations and discoveries raise questions among academics. Many of them try to explain the reasons why the Portuguese explored the Atlantic: poverty as a motivator of the search for wealth and commercial profits (Birmingham 2000, 2-3; 1999, 1, 33); Portugal’s privileged geographical position on the Atlantic (Santos, C. 1997, 15); peninsular warfare as a driving valve for overseas expansion (Santos, J. 1998, 147-148); the game between empires and the subjugation of other peoples (Godinho 1998, 55; Alencastro 1998, 193); the development of the mercantilist trade (Novais 1995), among others. As much as the discussion raises divergent points, there is common ground on one of the developments: navigations led Europeans to find a “new other”, resulting in issues such as the definition of “our world”, their “world” (Borhein 1998, 17-18, 32-33) and the establishment of relationships between “different worlds” (Godinho 1998, 71-72; Birmingham 1999, 12-13).

Following the initial meeting, contact between different societies would bring new challenges. In the words of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho,

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to study the contact would be to invent “the unity of mankind in plurality” (Godinho 1998, 77, 80, 82). From an analogous perspective, since the 1960s, Africanists have emphasized the importance of local contexts in the process of creating “bridges of connection between worlds”. From this interest two points are raised: the first is linked to the notion of “frontier”; the second are some of the notions of “Luso-Africanities”.

Contrary to a historiographical study, this article is an essayistic reflection on some notions and understandings that run through African studies about the Portuguese expansion in West and Central West Africa. Therefore, we will not dwell on the conditions of production, ideological affiliations or trends that competed for the elaboration of historical narratives, but on the “itinerant sharing” of ideas, the circularity of conceptual uses and reuses and the “general solutions” provided for some canonical problems. In this sense, we are influenced by a reflection proposal presented by Leila M. G. Leite Hernandez (2014). Our objects of analysis are the most influential works that address the stories of Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau for the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

What are the shares and circularities that mesh the notions of border and Luso-Africanity? How are these ideas associated with meetings and contact studies? Is the notion of boundary necessary for the contemporary epistemic paradigm? Are there risks in neglecting it? These are some of the problems that will be analysed through the text.

From the Africanist frontier to the global connection

Our starting point are the interdisciplinary proposals of Philip D. Curtin and Jan Vansina, founders of the Madison-Wisconsin African Studies Program³. Since the founding of this research nucleus in 1961, these scholars have proposed writing a history of Africa capable of inserting African particularities, such as those of some historical events and other specificities, into the universality of mankind through the so-called “general standards of change” (Curtin *et al.* 1995, xiii). The fundamental question that perpetrated Madison-Wisconsin was: “How do human societies change over time?” (Curtin *et al.* 1995, xiv).

Even though they used exclusively European criterias of analysis, being sometimes accused of ethnocentrism, Curtin and Vansina were impor-

³ Information taken from the institutional electronic address of the African Studies Program: <http://africa.wisc.edu/>.

tant defenders of African history as an independent discipline. The separation between Europe and Africa will be highlighted in this sense as a split between “worlds”. By world is meant a macroregion whose traditional or historical framework is confused with the existence of broad linguistic-cultural groups. A world follows a linguistic and socio-historical pattern, such as the association between the Bantu macro group with a common matrilineal structure, recurring from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Coupled with the understanding of the world follows the “frontier” which, in turn, establishes the boundaries between cultural, linguistic, historical and traditional structures. To make it clear how these terms are associated, we have outlined a brief reconstruction of how the historical anthropology of Madison-Wisconsin worked them.

Particularly interested in understanding how states arose and functioned in Africa and, to a lesser extent, how contacts with Europeans influenced the course of the continent, ethno-historians⁴ defended the ‘regressive history method’⁵. This mode of writing history assumes that the historical process, or “evolutionary line”, would be a chronologically narrated explanation of local communities’ development in political societies (Vansina 1990, 31). Such an explanation would be encapsulated in the “original tradition” that founds societies, stimulating the creation of legitimating devices of the sociopolitical order that embody political and social institutions. In Africa, this would be visible in the different ways of telling an oral tradition, modifiable according to the stimuli of the environment. For example, an oral tradition may be altered to meet the claims of members seeking to gain a leadership position in the community. Added to the ancestral prominence – closely linked with political leadership – the original tradition is also a hereditary and perpetual cultural aspect, structuring worldviews and ideologies that provide cohesion to the social body. Thus, it is a “structural”, “natural” or “biological” trait of African and non-African societies (Vansina, 2004, 2; 1990, 5-6, 8-9, 31 and 33).⁶

There is a third element necessary to the historical process, in charge of change over time. They are the processes of convergence and divergence, a kind of “engine” that would drive human development through the adop-

4 The word “ethno-historian” will be applied here in the narrow sense to researchers identified in historical anthropology.

5 What has been called regressive history here is called by Jan Vansina *upstreaming* (Vansina 2004, 12-13; 1990, 32-33). Importantly, the same notion of regressive history was already present in Marc Bloch (2001, 66).

6 For example, Curtin uses the “rule of least moves,” a natural science paradigm that argues that the tendency for an action to continue to be directly proportional to lower energy expenditure to explain how group migration populations have resulted in the settlement of increasingly distant regions (Curtin 1995, 6-7).

tion of new techniques or technologies, thereby generating sociopolitical innovations (Curtin 1995, 6-8; Vansina 2004, 14). Successive innovations, in turn, would cause population clusters to “jump” from one “simple” stage of development to a “more complex” one, so that sociopolitical evolution would be a ladder, composed of several steps or stages, surpassable in favor of raising to a “higher level” of development in the form of a political society or governance (Vansina 2004, 2).⁷ In other words, the evolution of African communities would involve the union of various groups under the umbrella of governance, around which political societies organize institutions responsible for maintaining internal order and defending against external threats (Vansina 2004, 2-3 and 261).

For the founders of Madison-Wisconsin African Studies, the notion of “frontier” can be interpreted as a dividing line between worlds and distinct histories, coupled according to sociocultural, linguistic communities, and thought traditions capable of relating memories and processes of change which vary diachronically and synchronously. The idea of the Africanist frontier is perceived in the light of the notions of world and history.

Such conceptions of temporalities and spatialities were rethought by some transnationalist historians from the 1970s to the 1990s.⁸ Joseph C. Miller (1995), John K. Thornton (1998) and Linda M. Heywood (2002) do not make a deep differentiations between what would be properly African and what would be properly European. Drawing on universal categories of analysis, what sets societies apart is not necessarily the social institutions that shape them — family, kinship, transversal affiliation, and other “specific contexts” — but historical experiences. The historicity of African societies operates in the same way as other human societies, although it gives rise to particular manifestations and variations.

In addition, some economic, religious, or political denominators could be called upon to explain the connection between distinct worlds. Here an important consideration about contacts is highlighted. The groups identified as “Africans” were not merely plundered or supporters of European expansion in the Atlantic, but actors of the continent’s relationship with Atlantic trade; On the other hand, foreign influence could generate decisive innovations when absorbed. In this sense, Miller wrote in “Kings and Kins-

⁷ American ethno-historians use quite different political terms to describe equally diverse political realities in the words governance, government and polity.

⁸ The term, transnationalist history, was used by Tobias Green to characterize this current (2012, 1). The transnational perspective in African studies was strongly influenced by the works of Fernand Braudel, Frédéric Mauro and Pierre and Huguette Chauu (Green 2012, 1 and 6; Thornton 1998, 13-14 and 17).

men: Early Mbundu States in Angola” that the establishment of the political alliance between Portuguese and Africans would have facilitated the full development of the imbangala⁹ state of kulaxingo¹⁰ (Miller 1995, 174-175, 177, 182, 189 and 195-196). Thornton, in “Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World” (1998), proposed the existence of the so-called “Atlantic world” as a result of the cultural and commercial exchange between Europe, Africa and America, and this perspective is reinforced in *A Cultural History of the Atlantic World* (2012).

Underlining the Atlantic power play, Tobias Green recalls that the transnationalist perspective integrated economies and cultures into the global system (Green 2012, 1). By “global” it is meant European, mercantilist, expansionist and overseas. John K. Thornton, for his part, considers that the slave trade operated through the legal system and social relations that were part of African societies (Thornton 1998, 97), leading to the widening of Atlantic contacts and the interconnection between histories – local, regional and global – in the long-term process (Thornton 2012, 5; Green 2012, 1 and 24-26).¹¹ More than comparing different worlds, it is necessary to connect them in view of the categories that structure the human universe.

Because they are closely associated with the problem of discoveries and contacts between different societies, the determination of boundaries and the possibility of connecting them enables analyses based on “scale games”, associating the global – long-term trade and long distance affiliation networks – with the regional – the political decision of the sovereigns and their local reflexes – and the local facts. The analytical lens can also be adjusted to varying temporalities, such as the long-term – the structures – the medium duration – the business cycles – and the short duration – the fact. On a small scale, it would be possible to search the different agents that cohabitated shared spaces – disposition of people in groups, subgroups, communities and villages – as well as to scan the written sources, detailing the relationships maintained between terms, names and words in the language in textual composition.¹²

⁹ Joseph C. Miller proposes that the warring groups called “jagas” in Portuguese documentation would be the “imbangalas” (Miller 1995, 149).

¹⁰ According to Miller, “kulaxingo” was a title of lunda power used by imbangalas (Miller 1995, 189).

¹¹ Here we keep the term “transnationalism” as used by Tobias Green.

¹² In this sense we are influenced by Zeron *et al.*, 2015.

Luso-Africanity as a connecting bridge

In African studies, the proposition of specific histories – the history of the mbundu, imbangala, Kongo – is usually inserted in the precondition of general histories, such as the history of Africa or the history of Portuguese expansion. Whether through general or specific focus, these stories are not closed in themselves. Thus, since the 1960s Africanist historians have proposed means of communication and intersection between the various histories. The idea of global connection provided effective means for the study of mediation and forms of negotiation, urging the need to overcome the ideas of African “isolation” and “exoticity”. One of the consequences of this approach was the unveiling of the notion of Luso-Africanity, or of people identified as “Luso-African”,¹³ understood as mixed blood, cultural and political agents.

The conformation of Luso-African identities is supported by the crossing of borders. Moreover, it is pointed out that these relationships are related to the cultural and economic aspects that act as bridges of connection between the Atlantic trade careers and the Sahara merchant caravans, as we will explain below.

Supported by the analytical model of the “commercial diaspora”,¹⁴ Philip D. Curtin stated that merchants, by crossing the traditional cultural boundary, played the role of “transverse intermediaries between cultures”¹⁵, becoming the embryo of “diasporic trade”. Over time, these individuals constituted itinerant communities within the foreign enclaves that welcomed them, facilitating trade and the maintenance of merchant networks (Curtin 1975, 59). The success of the commercial diaspora was directly linked to the ability of the “transverse intermediaries” to perpetuate ties with those who gave residence or residence permits, which involved two types of mediation. On the one hand, in order to secure business, cross-cutting intermediaries should behave in accordance with local habits and customs, for example by respecting the kinship network and rituals of welcoming communities. The establishment of bonds of solidarity made commercial exchanges possible, and could generate cultural and blood mixture in different ways. On the other hand, in the economic and legal fields, mediation should assist in dealing

¹³ There are several terms used to refer to these individuals: “Euro-African”, “Afro-European”, “Afro-Portuguese” and the most common of them, “Luso-African”. We will call this more or less cohesive and closely related set of labels “Luso-Africanity”.

¹⁴ Or *trade diaspora*, term coined by Abner Cohen, according to Curtin.

¹⁵ The word originally used by Curtin is *cross-cultural broker*.

with different local authorities, so that foreigners are able to use regional jurisdictions for their own benefit (Curtin 1975, 60).

Transverse intermediaries exercised multiple trades and could assist in the structuring of “commercial enclaves” capable of monopolizing the link between distinct economic systems. In this regard, Curtin provided the example of the juulas, as opposed to the European case. Centered on small, self-functioning firms, the “juula trading diaspora”¹⁶ did not monopolize trade because it had simple financing and value-determination techniques, unable to control “market forces.” The same was not true of the European, multifunctional enclaves and aggregators of a large number of specialists. The very social composition of these enclaves was more diverse, with miscegenated people and different cultural backgrounds, unlike the young, unmixed, and usually reproductive communities of social hierarchies similar to those of neighboring communities. It was through multifunctionality and cultural or even bloody hybridism that the intermediaries operating in the European enclaves managed to monopolize the connection between the Atlantic and the Trans-Saharan trade (Curtin 1975, 60, 63-66).

Walter Rodney was another researcher who highlighted the importance of intermediaries, viewing them as individuals who were neither “Portuguese” nor “African”.¹⁷ For him, the contact between distinct societies and cultures was the side effect of the “expansion of the European trading system to embrace specific roles in global production” (Rodney 1989, 199), thereby ensuring the influx of goods between societies at “fundamentally different stages of development”. “Euro-African trade” fitted two asymmetrical socio-economic traditions, one from a more developed European matrix and another from a less developed African matrix. Out of economic imbalance emerged the “Afro-Europeans” (Rodney 1989, vxiii, 191-192). Sometimes identified as

¹⁶ The juulas (dioula or dyula) are mercantile peoples scattered throughout various regions of West Africa. The American historian identifies three commercial Judas diasporas in Senegambia: i) The first of the Gajaaga group, culturally and linguistically belonging to the Soninkes (also known as sarakole, saraculeh or sarahuli) (Curtin 1975, 69-72); (ii) the second of the Jahanke group, consisting of “melinkezado soninkes” located in Jahaba (Curtin 1975, 69-72 and 76); iii) the third of the Mori group, composed of Muslim Malinkes who traded from the mouth of the Gambia River to Bamako on the Niger River (Curtin 1975, 69-72 and 81). Although the word “juula” has a Portuguese translation, “diula”, we will choose the spelling in malinke, as proposed by Philip D. Curtin.

¹⁷ Usually Rodney uses the terms “Afro-Europeans” and “Afro-Portuguese”.

successors of the “launched”, “tangomaos”¹⁸ and “cabin boys”¹⁹, sometimes as members of mixed families such as Caulkers, Clevelands and Rogers of Sierra Leone, for Walter Rodney African-Americans are characterized as mulattos who “served the interests of mercantilism” (Rodney 1989, 200). Its more specific variety, the Luso-African, was described by the researcher as being “closely associated with the Portuguese”, in the form of an identity linked to Christianity and Lusitanism, despite the blackness of the skin (Rodney 1989, 202-203). The Luso-African communities were culturally hybrid, as their members had tattoos, wore Western robes, carried swords, muskets and spoke “Portuguese Creole”. Adhering to a syncretic religion, in which the cross was as important as the “gris-gris”²⁰, the Luso-Africans celebrated the Catholic saints, while paying homage to their ancestors. Finally, they performed professional mediation activities, such as interpreters, diplomats, pilots, and advisers, and engaged in private commercial activities (Rodney 1989, 202-204, 207-208, 212, 216-219, 221).

In Rodney’s thinking, Luso-Africanity appears as a junction between a “developed”, precapitalist African economy, and other “underdeveloped” one (Thornton 1998, 74, 77-79 and 85-86). Understood as a mixed religious and cultural category, the mulatto had the ease of transiting between worlds, thereby exercising the function of crossing borders.

Deepening the considerations about the “context of economic dependence,” Paul E. Lovejoy argues that the “African state economy” sought to monopolize the slave trade, thus participating in the development of commercial capitalism (Lovejoy 2002, 15, 20-22, 180). In the process, African cooperation with the Atlantic trade has gradually transformed endogenous

¹⁸ There are several understandings about what were the “launched” and “tangomões” (tangomaos or tangomões). First, they are described as Portuguese who lived on the coast of Guinea, “outside the law” of Portugal (Torrão 1995, 24-26). They were individuals who lived on the Atlantic coast, were active in the Atlantic trade and who went through a process of “miscegenation”, thus being called “Luso-Africans” (Horta 2010, 56-57; Curtin 1975, 75-76). For Walter Rodney, both “launched” and “tangomao” were generic terms used to denote private traders, the former being whites residing on the continent and acting as Angola’s “doves”, while the latter were whites who adopted their local religion and customs (Rodney 1989, 74-75, 81). The “launched” were often identified as New Christians (Green 2007, 28-29, 101-102).

¹⁹ “Cabin boy” was a term used to refer to any African who was a helper for European merchants and lived in the “launched” communities (Rodney 1989, 77). They could be “sailors recruited [,] especially from African maritime groups [,] by Portuguese and Portuguese-descendant traders”, providing services such as guides, boat repairers and merchants. The cabin crews could present themselves both as African and as Portuguese, indicating a “multiple identity fluidity” (Horta 2010, 62-63 and note 65).

²⁰ According to Rodney, “gris-gris” were charms worn by the people of Upper Guinea, consisting of a piece of paper housed in a leather bag (Rodney 1989, 230-231).

societies into class-based “slave societies” (Lovejoy 2002, 177-9, 210-211). The ruling elite of these societies, the “warlords”, eager for goods obtained through the slave trade, began to foment the reasons for hunting men, generating a “general state of insecurity”. At the heart of these slave autocracies was a ruling class of Luso-Africans, ensured by the privilege of transit between distinct worlds (Lovejoy 2002, 178-179).

Another consideration of Luso-Africanism derives from John K. Thornton’s criticism of Walter Rodney’s “African underdevelopment” and Paul E. Lovejoy’s “general state of insecurity” (Rodney 1989 and 2012; Lovejoy 2002). Disagreeing with both, Thornton denies the hypothesis of economic and political disparity, claiming that African inferiority and chaos are unlikely (Thornton 1998, 54-55, 74, 77-79, 85-86, 89-90 and 93-94). Moreover, Thornton maintains that European interference on the continent between the 15th and 18th centuries was small, making the “thesis of transformation” and subsequent “state of general war” in Africa unsustainable (Thornton 1998, 54-55; 2003, 150-151). Highlighting the leading role of the African people²¹, Linda Marinda Heywood and John K. Thornton consider that the European presence was not imposed by foreigners, but consented when possible and absorbed by locals when necessary. In addition, by minimizing the negative impact of trafficking on the continent, Heywood and Thornton point out that foreign influence has led to the emergence of an “Atlantic Creole culture” characterized by the use of local surnames mixed with Portuguese names, the use of European clothing and singing of foreign songs (Seibert 2012, 33-35). Understood as a synonym for “Creolization”, this hybridism would characterize another type of Luso-Africanity, also marked by the “racial mix” that made it possible to experience “both Central African worlds” (Thornton 2012, 253-254; Heywood and Thornton 2007; Heywood 2002).

Creolization recurs in the historiographies of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau. For Tobias Green and Iva Cabral, this phenomenon is mainly insular, as opposed to the coast of Guinea and other continental portions, where Luso-Africanity prevailed (Cabral 1995, 272; Green 2007, 27; Seibert 2012, 50-51). More circumscribedly, creolization would be a reflection of the economic crisis, marked by the “inward turning” process of the Cape Verde archipelago (Teixeira 2005, 13, 19, 184-186 and 192). This explanation also runs through the General History of Cape Verde, organized by Maria Emília Madeira Santos (1995), whose cornerstone lies in Maria Manuel Ferraz Torrão’s model of analysis, related to the “economic cycles”. The explanation proposed by Torrão is as follows: a first cycle of economic development took

²¹The term “protagonism” or “African protagonism” was suggested by Alexandre A. Marcussi.

place between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, prosperous thanks to the function of “complementarity”, or “bridge of connection,” which the island settlement played as a mediator between the Atlantic trade and the periphery of the trans-Saharan routes (Clod 1995, 17-19, 24-26). From the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, such route would decline, giving way to a systemic rearrangement in which the archipelago would be exempt from transatlantic trade (Torrão 1995, 34-35 and 94, 116, 123). The isolation of Cape Verde would trigger creolization, while on the continent the descendants of miscegenates would be at the mercy of Luso-Africanity. While this would be marked by a strong “mulatization”²², that would be marked by a strong “Africanization” (Green 2007, 29 and footnote 19; Cabral 1995, 232, 236 and 245; Silva 1995, 352-353).

Luso-Africanity had the uniqueness of reproducing some multiple identity practices, according to Tobias Green and José da Silva Horta, capable of recreating a universe in which endogenous and exogenous aspects converged in favor of a “Luso-African world”, or in a “Crypto-Jewish affiliation network”. Returning to the discussions of Peter Mark (2008), Georg E. Brooks (2003) and Philip J. Havik (2004), Green points out that such practices determine the fusion of cultural aspects of different matrices – Jewish, African, Portuguese, among others –, creating porous communities receptive to the presence of outsiders. This would be the “modern synthesis” of European overseas experience (Green 2007, 28-29, 337-338). Similar argument leads to José da Silva Horta, for whom textual production is reflected in the consolidation of a “Cape Verdean-Guinean world”, represented by a chain of intermediaries, or “co-authoring informants” Luso-Africans, responsible for the transmission of information that would end up fixed in text format. To be operable, this chain of brokering triggered multifaceted identity practices and elicited fluid belongings whereby a physically African individual could claim to be Portuguese, or a Jew could claim to be Catholic (Horta 2010, 2-3, 5, 9, 377- 379).

For Green and Horta, the dual communities, or Luso-Africans, are the key point for the proposition of a “connected history” writing,²³ model that seeks to “reconstitute the historical ties” of different peoples through “common denominators”. The so-called “Luso-African History” would embrace

22 It is a phenomenon of blood mixture and skin coloration (Teixeira 2005, 13 and 19; Silva 1995, 352-353). “Creolization”, on the other hand, is a concept originally derived from linguistics (Seibert 2012, 30-31).

23 José da Silva Horta refers to the so-called *connected historie*, recalling the works of Roger Chartier, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and Serge Gruzinski, John K. Thornton and Patrick Manning (Horta 2010, 10 and note 28).

“two sides of the same coin”, merging the history of European expansion with the history of Africa, as it should be the case with “all other extra-European stories involved with the former”. (Horta 2010, 10). Contrary to what Philip D. Curtin and Walter Rodney propose, the rise of Luso-Africanity as a common denominator seems to obliterate the difference, asymmetry and dissonance between societies immersed in Atlantic contact. The investigative focus on multiple or multifaceted identities takes effective experiences of social reproduction and political and military shocks to the background, addressing colonial violence and eliciting an almost “amnesia” about what dominated Atlantic relations were.

Conclusions

The varied understandings about worlds, borders, hybridity and creolization intersect the notions of border and Luso-Africanity. Recently, debates on these themes have rekindled academic spirits, raising criticism and various solutions. Just check the articles by Roquinaldo Ferreira (2006; 2012), Flavio dos Santos Gomes (Gomes and Ferreira, 2008), Rafael de Bivar Marquese (2006), Maria da Conceição Neto (1997) and Francisco Bethencourt (2011). In light of the considerations made by these researchers and the insights developed in this article, we will give some considerations.

A methodology that minimizes the difference between societies and thus abdicates boundaries demarcation is controversial. First, when the boundaries between the self and the other are versatile, one has the impression that equality between peoples results in horizontal political and social relations. The danger lies in the substitution of scrutiny by simplistic generalizations, backed by the denominators of cultural hybridism, blood miscegenation, multiple identities, religious syncretism, and peaceful social fusion between the societies in contact. Ultimately, the softening of the conflicting environment and the focus on conciliation between peoples diminishes the importance of disagreement between them, as if agreement supersedes divergence. This is what happens when Luso-Africans and the “integrated” ones figure as the central theme of the investigations: the struggle between men loses relevance and inequality is mitigated.

Secondly, the notions of hybridity, syncretism, mulatization, and creolization lack circumscribed definitions. What would cultural exchanges and mixtures be? In which environment is a religiously or culturally “pure”, “original” and “isolated” matrix preserved? Are the contexts analyzed really

relevant in relation to the whole?²⁴ The lack of epistemological and analytical clarity generates an exacerbated fluidity between what is “western” and what is “African”, having as a side effect the degeneration of the limits and dissimilarities between self and other. Reinforcing our previous considerations, this accentuates the relegation, or obliteration, of the cruelty of the slave trade, the violence generated by the experience of colonial domination, the sexual exploitation suffered by African women, and the suffering inflicted on “Europeanized” blacks. Thus, although the proposal of “Luso-African history” is tempting, it commonly presents features of European superiority, being indifferent to the asymmetrical processes that sometimes mark the clash between different societies (Sanchez 2011, 33).

In the end, revitalizing the notion of frontier not only allows the disclosure of contact as a traumatic experience of negotiation and conflict, but also sharpens the critical reflection on the academic-scientific production on Africa, encouraging the questioning of the notions of “societies with state”, “without state”, “hamita thinking” and “the sudanese state hypothesis”²⁵ In addition, the reinvigoration of the notion of frontier can be associated with the exploration of connecting bridges between different worlds, as well as with research on ways of crossing frontiers and the detailed analysis of the agents involved in them, as proposed by Carlos Alberto de Moura Ribeiro Zeron. (1999, 30-31, 37-38). However, such approaches have some risks and disadvantages.

On the one hand, the notion of boundary and correlatives encapsulates ideas linked to evolutionism and the difference between the “more complex” and the less “complex” (Macgaffey 2008, 224, 239). On the other hand, the association of the Africanist frontier with the idea of original tradition is currently criticized by African thinkers. For Achille Mbembe, the idea of African tradition was created during the colonial period as a way of inserting local peoples into the orbit of the “civilized”. Thus, “exotic Africa” came to be framed in “human universality”, while safeguarding its own specificities or identities (Mbembe 2001, 178-179 and 188). Valentin-Yves Mudimbe also distrusts the tradition’s alleged historical validity, arguing that it would often be an “idea of Africa” related to the tradition of Western thought, not necessarily anchored in some endogenous materiality (Mudimbe 1994, xv).

²⁴ Take for example the work of Souza, 2006.

²⁵ According to Miller, the “Sudanese state hypothesis” encapsulates some of the premises of “Hamita thinking”, which the most important are the associations between the “civilizing conquest” and the emergence of states (Miller 1995, 2-4, 7). Jan Vansina was one of the leading researchers to refute this approach, although it is still discussed. See Barry 2000, 24; Miller 1995, 8-10, Santos 2008, 173.

For Paulin J. Hountondji, however, traditions, when interpreted through European ethnological optics, would be linked to ideological discourses about Africa (Hountondji 2008, 150-151 and footnote 4).

Even so, border issues and Luso-Africanities remain debated. The clearest sign of this derives from two works. The first of these is “The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies”, edited by Igor Kopytoff in 1987. In it we observe the characterization of the “African frontier” as being regional and open, “internal” and “interstitial”, thus being marked by ambivalence and overlapping traditions and cultures. As Catarina Madeira Santos (2005, 14-16) observes, such a notion of frontier is susceptible to the “advances”²⁶, “retreats”, “receptions” and “recreations” of the peoples and cultures in contact, making it “flexible” and “dynamic”. The other is *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830*, published by Joseph C. Miller in 1988. In it, the expansion of the “slave frontier” inland confirmed the great importance that Atlantic traffic held for the royal treasury and for agents involved in the commerce of persons, such as governors and captains. In this sense, both Joseph C. Miller and Paul E. Lovejoy agree that there was a kind of geographically indeterminate line, perhaps even “imaginary”, from which most “exportable” slaves to the Atlantic trade could be drained (Lovejoy 2002; Miller 1988, 666 and 676). The fact is that the crossing of any of these boundaries implies the effective participation of agents who, in holding dubious or ambiguous identities, did not necessarily mediate the encounter between distinct cultures or produced a hybrid culture.²⁷

New empirical research, focused on the material reality of African groups and individualities, as well as the scrutiny of written sources, can make valuable contributions to the dynamics and complexities of the encounters, contacts, and relations of domination that intertwined societies, temporalities, and spatialities immersed in slave trade and the capitalist advance. The focus of the question is not so much on generalizing, but on interconnecting and comparing specific knowledge, in order to achieve an imaginable universalization that enables the writing of the stories of Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau at Atlantic or at global level. Rather than postulate the existence of common denominators referring to the writing of a Luso-African history, we expect that it is necessary to undertake descriptions, analyses and evaluations capable of unveiling and verifying the whole by the parties,

²⁶ The terms used are *internal e interstitial* (Kopytoff 1987, 9).

²⁷ More considerations about the relationships between borders and identities can be found in Ito 2015, 1-10; 2016, 297-298, 310-311.

thereby harmonizing the methodological lenses of the microscale with that of macroscale.

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ABSTRACT

This article develops the notions of “frontier” and “Luso-Africanity”, addressing some cases anchored in the writing of the history of Angola, Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau for the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. The guiding thread of this narrative is the sharing and circularity of these notions, split into two moments. In the first, we will understand the notion of the Africanist frontier, as it affects the studies developed by North-American historiography since the postwar period. In a second moment, we will introduce some notions of “Luso-Africanity”, drawing attention to the focus given to multiple identity practices. At the end of this article, we will point out some of the risks and obstacles that permeate the notion of Luso-Africanity, the main one being the dissolution of the differences, asymmetries and inequalities that have crossed the Euro-African contacts. As a working hypothesis, we assume that future researches will carry out more empirical investigations, as well as support a more critical stance on cultural hybridism, blood miscegenation, multiple identities, religious syncretism and peaceful social fusion.

KEYWORDS

History of Angola; History of Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau; Borders and identities.

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