

2016

Candido, Mariana. *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, 366 pp.

Anthony A. Lee
UCLA, member1700@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <http://encompass.eku.edu/jora>

Recommended Citation

Lee, Anthony A.. "Candido, Mariana. *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland*. Cambridge University Press, 2013, 366 pp." *Journal of Retracing Africa*: Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2016): 74-78. <http://encompass.eku.edu/jora/vol3/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Encompass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Retracing Africa by an authorized editor of Encompass. For more information, please contact Linda.Sizemore@eku.edu.

Candido, Mariana. *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland.* Cambridge University Press, 2013. xiii + 366 pp.

This volume is the first history of Benguela and its hinterland, located on the central coast of present-day Angola, to be published in English. It is a brilliant addition to a growing number of monographs devoted to various African ports and their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade.¹ Until now, this literature has focused exclusively on West Africa and the trade in the North Atlantic. This study shifts the historian's interest southward to Benguela, a major point of departure for enslaved Africans, most of whom were transported to Brazil. During the course of some two-hundred years, more than 700,000 slaves were boarded on ships at the Portuguese port of Benguela. Therefore, this book emphasizes the centrality of the South Atlantic in the slave trade by highlighting the direct Angolan connection to Brazil and the importance of Brazilian-born actors in the South-Atlantic world.

Divided into five chapters, the first two chapters of the book trace a chronological history of the Portuguese settlement at Benguela. Chapter 1 covers the first abortive attempt to gain a foothold in 1587, at what became known as Benguela Vehla (Old Benguela), to the establishment of the new colony at Benguela in 1617; then carries the history to 1710. Chapter 2 follows the development of the town as a major Atlantic slave port from 1710 to 1850, when the Portuguese outlawed the slave trade. To her credit, Candido at this point turns away from demographic analysis in the following chapters, seeking to write a social, political, and economic history of Benguela and the African societies that surrounded it. These societies were deeply transformed by the overwhelming importance of the slave trade and the continuous, endemic violence that it projected. Chapter 3 discusses the integration of Benguela and its hinterland into the international economy of the Atlantic world; and chapter 4 delves into the actual process and mechanisms of enslavement. Chapter 5 focuses on the political reconfiguration of the African states in the area of Benguela from 1600 to 1850.

This book is based on extensive research in Portuguese-language archives on four continents- in Angola, in Brazil, Portugal, and the United States. Looking at the region with a fresh perspective, Candido writes a revisionist history of the entire South Atlantic during the era of the slave trade. She takes issue, for example,

¹ See also Ouidah Robin Law, *The Social History of a West African Slaving Port, 1727-1892* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004); Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Randy J. Sparks, *Where the Negroes Are Masters: An African Port in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

with Joseph Miller's thesis of an expanding slave frontier that moved slave raiding and the capture of African victims farther and farther from the coastal towns over time.² Using data from the various archives, she argues that the frontier of slave raiding did indeed expand, but that coastal populations continued to be subject to attack and enslavement—even including neighboring Portuguese vassals and allies. Candido also disputes John Thornton's assessment that the slave trade had little effect on the agricultural production and demographics of the population in Angola.³

Candido discusses cultural exchanges at length, noting that "creolization" went both ways. While most people living near and around Benguela "ignored Christianity" and were able to resist identifying with the Portuguese, a privileged class was able to claim Portuguese protection from enslavement through marriage, conversion, legal status, and so forth. A much wider segment of the population became accustomed to European luxuries, such as cloth, alcohol, and other products that were traded for slaves. At the same time, Portuguese agents adopted African political ideas and conventions, married African women without church sanction, spoke Umdunbu, adopted African healing practices, and often lived in areas under African rulers. Nevertheless, the author makes it clear that the Portuguese and their African descendents were in Angola for the purpose of slave raiding and slave trading, which was the primary source of personal wealth and of revenue for the Crown. She emphasizes both the violence of the slave trade and the direct involvement of Portuguese agents in every aspect of that trade. No one remained safe from enslavement, regardless of their wealth or status, especially during periods of high demand for slaves. Both free blacks and Luso-African traders were likely to be kidnapped and enslaved. Even mixed-race subjects of the Crown, in effect citizens of Portugal, *filhos da terra*, were not immune from becoming victims of the trade. Additionally, African rulers who were allies of the Portuguese could be attacked for any frivolous reason and their people carried off as commodities of the trade.

Candido also takes on the long-running scholarly debate over the identity of the *Jaga*.⁴ Speculation has continued for decades over just who the *Jaga* were, or

²Joseph Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

³John K. Thornton, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth-Century Angola: Demographic Structures," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 14 (1980): 417-27.

⁴Joseph C. Miller, "Requiem for the 'Jaga' (Requiem pour les 'Jaga')," *Cahiers d'études africaines* (1973): 121-149; John K. Thornton, "A Resurrection for the Jaga (La résurrection des Jaga)," *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines* (1978): 223-227; Anne Hilton, "The Jaga Reconsidered," *The Journal of African History* 22, no. 02 (1981): 191-202; Beatrix Heintze, "The Extraordinary Journey of the Jaga Through the Centuries: Critical Approaches to Precolonial Angolan Historical Sources," *History in Africa* 34 (2007): 67-101.

were not, and whether they even existed. Using seventeenth-century documents Candido is able to demonstrate quite elegantly and convincingly that the Portuguese used the term *jaga* as a pejorative reference to any African polity with whom they were at war. The term, strongly associated with cannibalism, does not designate a particular ethnic group, but could be applied to any enemy of the Portuguese.

In her last chapter, entitled “Political Reconfiguration of the Benguela Hinterland, 1600-1850,” Candido makes an important attempt to construct a political and social history of the interior of Africa near Benguela that was touched by Portuguese intrusion. Here again, she emphasizes the violent and disruptive effects of the slave trade over this entire 250-year period, which she sees as centuries of political turmoil and economic instability. Slave raiding, she maintains, caused the collapse of existing states in the hinterland, the redirection of trade routes, the enrichment of new rulers, new patterns of African consumption, the transformation of local economies, the emergence of new ethnic identities, and profound changes in gender relations. This is an impressive and ambitious chapter which pioneers new territory in the history of West Central Africa. Most importantly, Candido offers a history of Caconda, a Portuguese fort built inland some 130 miles from Benguela, in an attempt to project Portuguese colonial power deep into the interior. Here, the author seems to overestimate Portuguese influence, however, since the Portuguese effort clearly failed, with the outpost always dependent on the protection of local rulers and sometimes overrun. In other words, the Portuguese at Caconda remained only one of many actors competing for dominance in the area. In fact, few whites ever lived at Caconda where the *donas*, African women who were wives and trading partners of Brazilian and Portuguese men, managed businesses of their own, owned slaves, and cultivated the land with non-slave dependents.

Candido should be praised for her sensitivity to the African subjects of her history whom she refuses to treat as statistics or as mere objects of study. She has advanced what Joseph Miller has termed the “biographical turn” in Black Atlantic history,⁵ by refusing to focus solely on statistical and demographic analysis, and by seeking meaning and value in individual biographies. Indeed, many of the mini-biographies in the book are based on rich archival sources, deliberate attention, and historical imagination. For example, she discusses the life of Dona Lourenca Santos, who in 1797 was a forty-five-year-old woman living at Caconda and trading in slaves, in partnership with her husband who lived in Luanda. By this time, 347 people lived in her compound, most of them free. She owned slaves—four men, fifteen women, three boys, and five girls. Most of her dependents, however, were

⁵Joseph C. Miller, “A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn,” in Lisa A. Lindsay and John Wood Sweet, *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) :19-47.

free women cultivators who worked her fields growing corn and sorghum for market. She was one of the wealthiest residents of Caconda.

Candido also recounts the story of Juliana, a young woman captured and enslaved in the interior of Benguela who was forced to walk to the fortress of Caconda, where she immediately drew the attention of José dos Santos Pereira, the captain-major and the highest-ranking Portuguese official in the area, who bought her at the public market in 1765. A few days after her purchase, José dos Santos Pereira was approached by Xancuri, an ambassador of the *soba* (king, ruler) of Kilengues, a local state, who offered him a ransom in order to take Juliana back to her relatives. Pereira agreed to sell her for the enormous sum of two *pecas da india*, that is, three or four male slaves over thirty-years-old and ten cows. The ambassador was able to deliver the cattle, but could only give Pereira one male slave. However, he promised to travel to Kilengues and return with more enslaved men. The captain-major agreed to the partial payment but stipulated that unless the ambassador could make full payment, Juliana would remain his slave for life. The ambassador never returned, probably because his village had been destroyed by a raid while he was in Caconda.

Although the ambassador's failure to return with full payment might have sealed Juliana's fate as a slave, for some reason, Pereira felt compelled to bring his new slave and four witnesses, all soldiers under his command, to the town's notary. There he drew up a letter of manumission which he gave to Juliana declaring that she would remain his slave unless her relatives could pay him the remaining slaves that were owed, but she would become free upon his death. However, when the governor of Angola in Luanda, Francisco Inocencio de Sousa Coutinho, was informed of these dealings he was outraged. He ordered that Juliana be freed immediately, insisting that manumission could not be granted with conditions. He ruled that Juliana could not be simultaneously a free woman and a slave, and that such a contradiction was "repugnant."

This eighteenth-century incident on the African continent, so rich in human drama, is valuable in its own right as a fragmentary biography of one enslaved African woman. Candido does not overlook that fact and brings it to life. But her historical imagination seems to be limited by her archival sources. Her narrative of Juliana's slavery and freedom attributes motives and agency to every actor in the incident except Juliana herself, who remains voiceless, invisible, and subaltern. Of course, this silence mirrors the silence of the Portuguese documents. Nonetheless, African historians must struggle to hear the voices of the subaltern, even when they are silent, as they most often are. These same Portuguese archival documents suggest that Juliana resisted her enslavement vigorously.

Since the *soba* of Kilengues sent his ambassador and was willing to pay a large ransom for Juliana's freedom, we should imagine that her family was extremely wealthy and probably a part of the kingdom's aristocratic elite, perhaps a member of the royal family. In any case, she would have been a woman who would not easily accept enslavement. Part of the captain-major's anxiety about his legal claim on Juliana, an anxiety which prompted his visit to the notary and the extraordinary letter of manumission given to his slave, may have been caused by Juliana's own loud protests against her bondage. Therefore, it would have been more satisfying for Candida to delve more thoroughly into her possible feelings and any actions that she may have taken to resist her enslavement. She may have played a role in her own emancipation.

Candido's local history of Benguela and its hinterland is well-written and is a pleasure to read. It is a rich and nuanced attempt to illumine the role of Brazil, Angola, and the South Atlantic in the history of the slave trade. The book engages and challenges the historiography of West Central Africa on the basis of firm documentary evidence and piercing argument. It advances the emphasis on biographies during the period, which is emerging as an important aspect of African history. This volume is a must read for all those interested in the history of the Atlantic slave trade.

Anthony A. Lee
Lecturer,
University of California, Los Angeles , CA