History (São Paulo)

Jagas, Canibalismo e "Guerra Preta": os Mbangalas, entre o mito europeu e as realidades sociais da África Central do século XVII

Jaga, Cannibalism and the "Guerra Preta": the Mbangala, between the European myth and the social realities of Central Africa in the XVII century

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Resumo: Os textos europeus do século XVII em geral conferem aos jagas papel determinante como elemento desagregador das populações centro-africanas, qualificando-os de selvagens, canibais e adeptos de práticas de idolatria. O objetivo do presente artigo é apresentar tais pontos de vista a partir do estudo dos rituais atribuídos aos jagas no tratado intitulado *Istorica descrizione de tre regni, Congo, Matamba et Angola*, de autoria do missionário capuchinho Giovanni Cavazzi de Montecúccolo. Tais rituais serão confrontados com as descrições a respeito do papel que os jagas desempenharam nas guerras do sertão africano durante o processo de conquista do Ndongo.
Palavras-chave: Jagas; Rituais; África Central; Relatos de viajantes.

Abstract: 17th century European texts generally describe the Jaga as a disruptive element among the Central African populations, calling them savages, cannibals, and idolaters. The objective of this paper is to present these points of view through a study of the rituals attributed to the Jaga in the work entitled *Istorica descrizione tre regni, Congo, Matamba et Angola*, authored by Capuchin missionary Giovanni Cavazzi de Montecúccolo. Such rituals will be confronted with descriptions of the role played by the Jaga in the wars of the African hinterland during the conquest of the Ndongo.
Keywords: Jagas; Rituals; Central Africa; Traveler accounts.

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The conquest of the coast of Central Africa by the Portuguese took place between the 16th and 17th centuries and was triggered by the contacts they established with the Bakongo people, from the current Republics of the Congo, and with the Mbundo people, from the People's Republic of Angola. Records of events of that broad context are scattered among documentary sources of diverse origins; but, especially in two accounts, which are well-known among historians, written in the second half of the 17th century: the *Istorica descrizione de tre regni, Congo, Matamba et Angola* [An Historical Description of Three Kingdoms: Congo, Matamba, and Angola], authored by Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi de Montecúccolo (1621-1678), and the *História Geral das Guerras Angolanas* [A General History of the Angolan Wars], authored by António de Oliveira Cadornega (1623-1690). Such accounts provide the reader with a broad picture of the circumstances leading to the politico-military conquest of the Kingdoms of the Congo and the Ndongo and of the first cycle of missionary activity, focused concomitantly on spiritual conquest (OLIVEIRA, 2010; MATTOS, 2011).

Context

The first contacts were made in what Europeans called the Kingdom of the Congo through diplomatic and commercial relationships with the endorsement of the *manicongos* belonging to the Lukeni clan, who at the time saw approximation with the Portuguese and with their style of life as a strategy of political affirmation before the other local leaders. During the reign of Mvemba-a-Nzinga, better known by his Christian name, Afonso I (c. 1456-1543), Christianity became the official religion of the kingdom, with the prohibition of traditional religions and worship of fetishes – which led to the movement known as "Revolt of the house of idols". Inspired by the governmental regiment sent by the Portuguese monarch Manuel I in 1512, a series of internal modifications was introduced in the Congo, with the conferring of titles of nobility and the lending of symbols of power of European provenance.[1]

Involved in internal conflicts that followed the death of Afonso I, the Kingdom of the Congo would suffer a great shock in 1568, when its population was attacked and partially massacred by a nomadic group of warriors who had become known as the *jagas*. In order to deal with them, the Congo needed the help of European troops and their firearms, and, after the scourge of the invasions had passed, pressure from Luso-

African slave traffickers based on the Island of São Tomé and from representatives of the Portuguese monarchy increased. During the first decades of the 17th century, the *manicongos* tried to approach other European nations, such as France, Rome and the Italian States, and even the Netherlands, to counterbalance the influence of the Portuguese in their areas of influence (VANSINA, 1965, p. 100-110; RANDLESS, 1968, p. 129-134). At the time when Cavazzi de Montecúccolo was writing his work, the Congo was quite weakened following its defeat in 1665 by the Portuguese in the battle of Mbwila, while other African centers of power gained greater influence, expanding into the interior, among them, the kingdoms of Matamba and Kasanje (THORNTON, 1982, p. 330).

Farther south, in Ndongo, contacts with the Europeans were not tranquil, marked by constant politico-military conflicts with the main rulers, the *ngola*. The first attack, from 1520-1526, failed and was bailed out by the *manicongo* Afonso I. The same thing happened in the campaign of 1560-1564. In 1571, in agreement with the *manicongo* Álvaro I (1568-1648), Captain Paulo Dias de Novais and his troops entered Mbundo territory, establishing their initial base of operations in the fortress of São Paulo de Luanda, founded in 1576. Articulating a policy of negotiations with the traditional chiefs of the smaller political entities, the *sobas,* regarding military enforcement against the opponents of Portuguese interests and of expansion of Catholicism through Jesuit, Carmelite, and Capuchin missionary activity, the Europeans gradually incorporated Ndongo. With this, the *sobas* were reduced to the condition of vassalage and subject to the payment of taxes, a situation that marked the starting point for the future province of Angola (BIRMINGHAM, 1974).[2]

The intensification of the conflict with the Portuguese was motivated by the dispute for control of the silver mines of Cambembe, the salt mines of Kissama, and the copper mines of Benguela, and most importantly for control of the slave trade. The effective conquest of the territory of Ndongo occurred during the first half of the 17th century, with an intensification of conflicts between 1605 and 1641, a period in which the Portuguese had greater success in their forays into Mbundo territory, weakening the authority of the *ngola* (HEINTZE, 1981). Finally, during the final phase of the Angolan wars, from 1641 to 1663, the dispute involved the interference of European competitors, the Dutch, and the articulation of military resistance in the charismatic figure of Nzinga Mbandi (1581-1663), the ruler first of Ndongo and later of Matamba (CURTO, 2008). It

was during this period that the African authorities requested increasing interference from the Roman Church by sending missionaries detached from Portuguese interests, which resulted in the sending, between 1645-1665, of a large contingent of Capuchins to the Congo and to Ndongo, among whom was included Giovanni Cavazzi de Montecúccolo (RICARD, 1958; RANDLESS, 1968, p. 225).

Jaga and Cannibalism

The account of Cavazzi de Montecúccolo comes from personal experience accumulated during the thirteen years that the writer remained in Central Africa (1654-1667), from data collected from other missionaries and local informants, from documentary research of letters written by clergymen, Congolese, and Portuguese authorities, in addition to consultation of earlier legal and narrative texts. Therefore, what we have is, in part, the view of a participating narrator and, in part, the work of a scholar and researcher.

According to some current researchers, like Mariana Bracks Fonseca, during most of his time in Africa, Cavazzi de Montecúccolo lived in Mpungo-a-Ndongo, where Ngola Are, Nzinga Mbandi's greatest adversary, ruled and from where the influence of negative information about her and the Jaga likely came from (FONSECA, 2012, p. 16). In the opinion of Mario Albano, shortly after a brief stay in Luanda, he had gone to the Kingdom of Matamba and became a personal friend of Nzinga, working directly towards her second conversion to Catholicism, in 1657, as her advisor and confessor, and even representing her on diplomatic missions to the Portuguese and to certain African authorities around 1660 (ALBANO, 2012).

What is certain is that greater or lesser physical proximity to the Africans did not affect the missionary's points of view, and, in general, he maintained an eminently Eurocentric position in his descriptions and a critical and mistrusting tone when faced with the institutions and the way of life of the population, the religious conversion of whom he had been entrusted the difficult task of promoting. His text has no lack of harsh words of disapproval for polygamy and for the forms of idolatry that persisted in the worship of ancestral spirits (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 93). Faced with a cultural, social, and political framework different from the Christian-European model, his reaction, like the other evangelizers, was denial, shutting himself off within his own frame of reference and negating any social value in the forms of organization of the

Central African populations (GONÇALVES, 2008, p. 116-127). By condemning polygamy, concubinage, and what was thought to be "free sex", for example, his vision only touched the surface of the social fabric, unable to discern the particular forms of kinship based on matrilineal and matrilocal or matrilineal and patrilocal lineages (ALMEIDA, 1997, p. 155-164).

This position reproduces, in a certain way, the condition under which Christianity was imposed in the Bakongo and Mbundo domains. Although the spread of Catholicism in the Congo and in Ndongo went back to the beginning of the 16th century, its proliferation did not promote the disappearance of native ancestral beliefs; however, it partly superimposed itself on them, absorbed them, and merged into them, which can be verified in the persistence of elements labeled negatively as "idolatry" and "superstition". In fact, adoption of Christianity by the Central Africans was neither immediate nor free from the interests of both sides involved in the process of conversion. The assimilation of Christian elements accomplished by means of the native languages created fusions and associations between Christianity and the magic-religious universe of the Congolese, "in a game of mirrors that tended to preserve, under a Christian veneer, the ancient cultural and religious practices" (NSONDÉ, 1992, p. 710; NSONDÉ, 1995).

Cavazzi de Montecúccolo's entire text is interwoven with the general ideas that had given form to Christian discourse since the Middle Ages, based on the Christianity/civilization, as opposed to the paganism/savagery, binomial (WOORTMANN, 2005; HORTA, 1991, p. 95-96). The only alternative considered reasonable for the Africans was the adoption of the "truth", represented by the Christian religion. He was aware, however, that this was no more than a thin veneer superimposed on the original social traits of the populations in the process of conversion and that a greater disposition for adoption of Christianity was found among the populations of the coast, the banks of navigable rivers, or the cities. Regarding this supposed propensity of the coastal populations towards Christianity, he proposes the following explanation: "in dealings with the Portuguese or with other Europeans, they are illuminated by the light of civilization and by more human and more reasonable notions" (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 86). According to his reasoning, the remote regions of the interior would be more "contaminated", more dominated by the old masters and customs, delivered to the grossest forms of savagery. And, the Jaga are the best example of a savage people little

given to the benefits of the Christian civilization, as may be seen in the general description that he provides of theses peoples:

> É uma gente de cuja boca sai continuamente a mentira e a falsidade, sempre dada ao roubo e a qualquer crime. É um povo sempre sedento de sangue e de carnificina, ávido devorador de carne humana, feroz contra as feras, cruel para com os inimigos e até contra os próprios filhos. Numa palavra: parece animado por sentimentos tão maus que o inferno nunca vomitou fúrias e tiranos que possam servir de comparação (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 175).

The quantity of negative adjectives in such a short passage, in which the Jaga are associated with crime, deception, and rampant violence, without any control of their appetites or instincts, in short, with the typical behaviors and attitudes of savage peoples, is impressive. This European idea of "savagery" must be linked to the development of a *topos* recurrent in the writings of Europeans who were in the Congo and Ndongo in the 16th and 17th centuries. Cavazzi de Montecúccolo reproduces this *topos*, attempting to explain it by using the conceptual tools that his Christian training allowed him to place the Jaga in the classification of the Christian world as a "cult" and describing in detail what seemed to him to constitute the distinctive traits of the group: the practices of infanticide, human sacrifice, and cannibalism.

Realizing that they were migrant groups, he began his description by identifying the area of dispersion of the Jaga, offering two possible interpretations. They could have begun their devastating migration from anywhere in the territory called Mwene-Muji, near the sources of the Nile and Zaire, or from the mountains of Sierra Leone. At first, they had been led by a warrior named Zimbo, and later by a woman, Temba Ndumba, moving through various locations until they infiltrated and attacked the Kingdom of the Congo:

> Devastando todo o reino e aumentadas as suas fileiras com os vencidos, que não tinham outra alternativa para não serem mortos, os jagas saíram, inundando os países limítrofes com um mar de sangue, e penetraram na Abissínia, que está situada no lado oposto da África (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 175).

While theorizing about the origins of the Jaga, there is then a generalizing explanation that confers upon them a position of centrality as a disruptive element in different areas of the African continent, from Abyssinia to the Congo, with attacks and

massacres against the eastern coast, the Portuguese fortress at Tete, and the ancient cities of Mombasa, Kilwa, and Malindi. This information is articulated by the chroniclers of the 17th century, such as the Portuguese, João dos Santos, in his *Ethiopia Oriental* [Eastern Ethiopia], published in 1609, who dramatically reports the invasions of fierce cannibals called *zimba* into communities near Zimbabwe in 1592 (ALINA, 2011). Such reports stimulated the emergence of a kind of history/catastrophe, accepted uncritically by European scholars until the beginning of the 20th century, when thinking back about the successive "barbarian" invasions of Jaga, Gala, Mane, and Zimba from 1491 to 1510, at the time of the first contacts with Europeans (AVELOT, 1912).

The result was the reinforcement of the myth of the cannibal tribes of Equatorial and Tropical Africa, which was already found scattered throughout Muslim texts, such as al-Idrisi, al-Masudi, and Ibn Battuta, prior to the 16th century (CUOCQ, 1974, p. 137; 203; 283; 313). Moreover, it gained strength in European discourse, especially in relation to the Gala of Abyssinia, the Mane of Sierra Leone, and Fang of Gabon, and the Azande (Niam Niam) (HEINTZE, 2006; HENRIQUES, 2004). In the colonial period, the accusation of cannibalism ended up being generalized and, in the case of groups who did practice anthropophagy, the explanation disregarded its ritualistic and ceremonial character, stripping it of any symbolic meaning and reducing it to a mere appetite for food (CORREA, 2008; CABRAL, 2007).

Records left by European writers prior to Cavazzi de Montecúccolo confirm the dramatic tenor accompanying the themes of the Jaga invasions into the Kingdom of the Congo. For Filipo Pigafetta, in his *Relação do Reino do Congo* [Account of the Kingdom of the Congo], written from the personal deposition of the Portuguese merchant, Duarte Lopes, in 1591, the nomads that came from the area near the headwaters of the Nile were "cruel and murderous people of great stature and a terrible countenance, feeding on human flesh" (LOPES/PIGAFETTA, 1951, p. 111-112). Their invasion of the domains of the Congo in 1568 had caused profound devastation to the realm, disrupting it and generating a state of widespread hardship, which forced *manicongo* Álvaro I to request the aid of the Portuguese monarchy. His appeal was answered with the sending of an armed troop of 600 men in the service of Francisco Gouveia, who returned to the Iberian peninsula in 1574 (PINTO, 2000, p. 215). Later, in 1601, the English adventurer, Andrew Battell, sent by the Portuguese to the Benguela Plateau, remained among the Jaga for four months, participating in their wars, describing the martial character of the group, their institutions, and their monuments,

the most important of which was located at the center of the community and was called *Quesango*. Around it were the skulls of the vanquished there sacrificed together with the blood of animals and palm oil (RAVENSTEIN, 1910, p. 33).

In the mid-1970s, the structural elements of the "Jaga myth", inaugurated by Pigafetta and reproduced by 17th century writers, by scholars and later historians, were the subject of an academic discussion opened by the North American experts Joseph Miller and John Thornton. To Miller, the "Jaga invasions" had no historical existence, but resulted from an invention of European writers, missionaries, slave traders, and functionaries of the Portuguese Crown. The attack of Mbanza Congo in 1568 had not been the work of external enemies, but of adversaries from the province of Mbata dissatisfied with the ascension of Álvaro I as ruler of the Congo (MILLER, 1973). In response to this interpretation, Thornton insisted on the foreign status of the attackers, who had left the Kwango region, located to the east and currently inhabited by the *Yaka* (THORNTON, 1978). Some time later, another specialist, the Belgian, François Bontik, entered the discussion, siding with Miller. In his opinion, the context in which the attacks to the headquarters of the *manicongo* government were carried out would confirm the existence of growing animosity among the chiefs of Mbata, following the change in the laws of succession on the occasion of the death of Afonso I, in 1545, which would have worsened during the reigns of Diogo (1545-1561), Henrique (1567-1568) and exploded at the crowning of Álvaro I (1568-1587) (BONTIK, 1980).

The debate continued with the research of Anne Hilton, who believed that the Jaga invasion should be reintroduced within the context of African history. In her words, *jaga* was a designation that was not tied to any particular ethnic identity; however, it had its etymological roots in the word *aka,* which simply meant the "other", i.e., the "foreigner", the "attacker", the "outlaw". It could be applied to different groups of outsiders in the Congo, like the Tio tribes of the north of Zaire, the Mbangalas, and the "Majaca", who migrated from the east, from Mbata, and were apparently the attackers of Mbanza Congo in 1568 (HILTON, 1981). This interpretation prevailed among historians and, more recently, Paulo Souza Pinto presented documentary sources as yet not considered in the debate, such as the *História de São Domingos* [History of Santo Domingo] by Frei Luís de Cácegas and Frei Luís de Souza, published in 1622, and in particular the unpublished account of João Ribeiro Gaio, who participated in a mission in the Congo in 1588 and recalls the military support lent by Francisco de Gouveia "against the *Iagas* who were men who ate human flesh" (PINTO, 2000, p. 211).

Although Miller's position on the historicity of the Jaga invasion of 1568 has fallen out of favor, it seems to us that several of his considerations should not be discarded. Due to flexibility in the application of the designation, the word *jaga* was used repeatedly in the primary sources of the 17th century to designate people of different natures, where the ideas of ferocity, savagery, and cannibalism were repeatedly used by the Europeans according to their interests. From the beginning of the 17th century, when disagreements within the Congo increased, the military support sent by the Portuguese gradually came to be remembered by the governors of Angola as a certain form of ascendancy in relation to the *manicongos*.[3] As for the text of the missionaries, the accusations against the Jaga assumed a grandiloquent tone, associated with the "superstitious" and idolatrous practices and detached from the original social practices of Central Africans. The first measure taken by Serafim de Cortona and Antonio Romano, the Capuchin friars who rebaptized Queen Nzinga, was to forbid the "rite of the Jaga", which, according to them, consisted of: 1) not rearing children; but leaving newborns to the wild beasts or to bury them alive; 2) adopting young prisoners of war as children by "pulling out their two front teeth"; 3) eating human flesh; 4) making human sacrifices to their ancestors; 5) adoring idols and other superstitions (ANGUIANO, 1957, v. 2, p. 14; BRÁSIO, v. 12, p. 199).

To this boldly colored image, with a great tendency to exoticism, we must add the adjectives and characterizations attributed to the emblematic figure of Queen Nzinga Mbandi due to her expressive leadership against the Portuguese from the 1620s to the 1660s. By abandoning Ndongo and moving to the Kingdom of Matamba, she had adopted the "law of the Jaga", mentioned in the previous paragraph, implementing it in the organization of a *kilombo*[4]. The exceptionality of her leadership had already caught the attention of her contemporaries, who projected a set of stereotypical images onto her. An anonymous work of 1663 claims that she dressed in men's attire and demanded to be called "King". Furthermore, when eating human flesh she especially appreciated female breasts and the heart. On another note, it was also said that she was served by three-hundred youths of both sexes, divided into six groups, dressing in the attire of the opposite gender and practicing free sex (BRÁSIO, v. 12, p. 469-472). In another account, by Belgian Barthélemy d'Espinchal, written in 1667, to these "aberrations" was added the information that her bravest warriors fought with the dried entrails of their already devoured adversaries tied around their necks, eating them before the

beginning of battle to better instill fear among the combatants of the opposition (BRÁSIO, v. 11, p. 254-255).

It was images such as these that together reinforced the myth of the "cannibal Jaga" and produced the stereotype of a "Queen Jinga", both depraved and devoided of humanity. This reinforcement benefitted the Capuchins, who knew how to exploit *ad nauseam* the task of reintegrating that government, together with its "savage" people to the standards of the Christian world. The scene in which Nzinga publically abandons the "gentile rites" and adopts monogamous marriage, the greatest symbol of the framework of values in the Christian world, was exhaustively reported at the time (BRÁSIO, v. 12, p. 94; 101-102; 199). However, the exotic aspects of her behavior prior to conversion continued to feed the European imagination during the Age of Enlightenment, and even continues to this day (MATA, 2012).

Mbangala and the "Guerra Preta"

Leaving the stereotypes aside, would there be any indication in the non-narrative documentation to confirm the rumored cannibalism of the Jaga? Indications relative to the group in correspondence and reports of an administrative character produced in the Congo and in Angola are much less emphatic than the narratives and suggest the possibility that the descriptive term "jaga" might be surrounded by widely shared rhetorical elements; nonetheless without factual evidence that could prove the consumption of human flesh as food. What this evidence easily proved is that, since the first decades of the 17th century, the Portuguese had been employing various groups of "jaga" in their auxiliary combat forces in the struggle against the armies of Mdongo and the Congo, in what seems to have been described in the sources as the "guerra preta" [black war].

Considering the allusions made by African authorities alone, it is clear that the description of the Jaga is rife with negative adjectives and that the impact was destructive. Among the repeated complaints submitted to the papacy against the gradual interference of the governors of Angola in the affairs of the Congo, Álvaro III said on 02/26/1622 that, with the support of the Jaga, the Portuguese were about to invade his lands (BRÁSIO, v. 7, p. 4). Soon thereafter, his successor, Pedro II, referring to the Battle of Mbundi, in which the Portuguese, supported by a large contingent of Jaga, attacked the province of Mbamba, states that these "devourers of human flesh" had

destroyed and caused desolation to the kingdom and that countless Christians had been eaten by them, among them the Duke of Mbamba, the Marquess of Pemba, and other nobles (BRÁSIO, v. 7, p. 161). Another letter, written by an anonymous canon from the Congo, repeats news of the "greatest slaughter" perpetrated by the Jaga against the allies of the King of the Congo, "entombing them all in the bellies of the barbarian Jaga" (BRÁSIO, v. 7, p. 294).

On the Portuguese side, references are ambiguous. In situations where military aid or financial support was being requested from the Iberian monarchs, the risks and dangers of the African hinterland, among them, cannibalism, were evoked. In 1612, André Velho da Fonseca reported that contact was made with the black merchants from Matamba, Tumda, and the most remote regions by passing through the lands of the enemies, "among whom the majority regularly eat human flesh" (BRÁSIO, v. 6, p. 65). A decade later, Governor Manuel Cerveira Pereira, intending to sensitize the authorities in Lisbon and gain more supporters for his project to take control of the copper mining regions of Benguela, lamented the small amount of ammunition available and the lack of men of war: "because we are few and in the end we are lost and eaten by the heathen of this land, and so I encompass you" (BRÁSIO, v. 6, p. 444).

Here, anthropophagy is used more as a rhetorical argument than as a proven practice, since under no circumstances are specific cases of the eating of human flesh mentioned nor are scenes of this type described. Who seems to better summarize the Portuguese view regarding the Jaga is Captain Baltasar Rebelo de Aragão, in his report on the progress of things in Angola. For him, the *iacas* were a foreign people "who lived to steal and make war", organized in "troops" under the leadership of "captains", or in other words, groups of seminomadic warriors. Under no circumstances is the practice of infanticide, cannibalism, or human sacrifice attributed to them, but for their ferocity in war it was fitting to have them as allies to keep the *sobas*, the local Mbundo chiefs, under control:

> Esta gente é bom tê-los por amigos, porque com temor deles obedecem e estão quietos os sovas, mas de presente se quis apertar tanto com eles que se levantaram e levaram muitos escravos nossos captivos; creio que serão maus de reduzir à nossa amizade, pela ruim companhia que lhe fazemos, estando debaixo de nosso amparo, mas pode-se adquirir outros para amigos e tratá-los bem (CORDEIRO, 1935, v. 1, p. 233).

The evaluation of Baltasar Rebelo de Aragão touches upon a critical point for the understanding of the role attributed to the Jaga in the conquest of Ndongo. Their alliance with the Portuguese guaranteed the submission of the *sobas*; however, the strengthening of the relationship led them to revolt, taking with them some of the prisoners of war. Another function performed by the Jaga is revealed here: the hunting and imprisonment of captives for the lucrative slave trade. Apparently, in the beginning they held an auxiliary position, but later went on to assume the predatory activities themselves, becoming competitors of the traders.

Portuguese documentation amply records the involvement of the Jaga in conflicts, sometimes as allies and others as enemies. In 1621, a military official lists the pacification of Luanda against the repeated attacks of Kasanje, a powerful Jaga warrior chief who had 16 other chiefs from the interior under his authority, among the first measures he took in Angola (BRÁSIO, v. 7, p. 17-18). In a similar source, the report of Manoel Pereira about the struggle for influence in the region of the copper mines of Benguela, between 1627-1639, attacks against several *kilombos* are recorded, among them, that led by Anguri, a Jaga who sacked and pillaged the region of Peringue and Maniberro, "stealing cattle and women". Nevertheless, in the attack against the *soba* of Cambembe, they had instituted 75 Portuguese soldiers and approximately 1500 Mbundo and Jaga blacks (FELNER, 1933, p. 568-569).

The constant recourse of the Portuguese to the effective Jaga warriors is reflected in the documentation produced during the administration of Fernão de Souza (1625-1630), which corresponds to the initial phase of the overthrow of the power of the traditional leaders of Ndongo (FONSECA, 2010, p. 398-406; DIAS, 1985). These military conflicts, the "guerra preta", had the effective and decisive participation of Jaga troops led by Zenza Rugumbe, Kwanza, Gunza, Gumby Ilyamgumbe, and Quinda. Two important Portuguese allies were Kabuku ka Ndonga and especially João Kasanje, who ended up being granted a concession of areas of influence by the Portuguese monarchy, afterwards known as the Kingdom of Kasanje or the Jagado of Kasanje (VELLUT, 1975).

The Jaga integrated, therefore, countless highly militarized microstates under the leadership of autonomous chiefs, who could act on their own or enter into alliances with the Portuguese or their adversaries at their convenience. The structure of these communities, designated by the generic term *kilombo,* was placed at the service of Portuguese projects in the interior and its use was clearly specified in the bylaws of the

local government. The way in which this "war machine" operated is described in the extensive report of Fernão de Souza and his sons, which states that:

> Por hum auto que se fez no kilombo, por mandado do capitão mor Bento Banha Cardoso, aos oito dias do mes de março de seiscentos e vinte e sete na Lucanda junto a Lugala, se assentou com o parecer dos capitães que visto estar a guerra junta, e yrse ajuntando, se não perdesse a occasião de marchar, e yr buscar io inimigo e tomar sitio, aonde a gente branca, e preta possa comer e não fuja, e se torne a desfazer o quilombo, e obrigue aos inimigos a pagar o tributo a sua magestade (HEINTZE, 1985, p. 285).

It is fitting to note the passage in the quotation in which, in the details of the consequences of a military siege, it states "where the white and black people can eat and not flee". Could this be an allusion to the practice of cannibalism by the "black people" just after the attacks? What is certain is that the participation of the Jaga was not viewed favorably by all Europeans to the extent that an anonymous report about the Angolan wars, written in August of 1630, proposed a legitimate war against those impious, fierce, and diabolical people, who neither work nor sow, and are given over to war, to the imprisonment of the conquered in order to eat some of them in real "public butcher shops of human flesh", and to sell some of them as slaves. Vagrants, destroyers, and untrustworthy, the Jaga were, in the end, groups of perfect traitors (HEINTZE, 1985, p. 212).

It is likely that such an unfavorable positioning of the Jaga is related to the rise to leadership of Nzinga Mbandi, which put her in a prominent position in the dispute for control of the Ndongo and as the major opponent of Portuguese interests. In fact, two ideas merit a bit more attention: the relationship between "public butcher shops of human flesh", the slave trade and the expression "traitors". It seems to be part of the same idea formulated by Baltasar Rebelo de Aragão, which states that the closer proximity between the Portuguese and the Jaga in acts of seizing captives eventually led to the Jaga assuming the business on their own, appropriating a percentage of the captives.

In regards to the association of Nzinga Mbandi to the Jaga, care must be taken in order to not reproduce the European stereotyped vision. Firstly, because she was not of Jaga origin, but came from the lineage of the *ngola a kiluanje*, and, therefore, belonged to the Mbundo group. Secondly, because she was not the only leader in the politico-military resistance against the advance of the Portuguese, nor were the Jaga, whom she

came to lead, which were the only ones to confront them. Her leadership occurred precisely at the time of the dispersion of the *kilombos* into the territory of the Ndongo and of the Congo, and in parallel with other important local chiefs, like Kafushe Kambari de Quissama and the Jaga, Kalandula, with whom she allied herself at a certain point. By implementing the military structure of a *kilombo* in Matamba, with the adoption of Jaga life and the title of *tembanza*, i.e., ruler, she sought to strengthen her position through "marriage", that is, an effective union with other important Jaga leaders – first, with Kasa, and later, with Kasanje (PINTO, 2000, p. 232; FONSECA, 2012, p. 138-146).

It is also fitting to consider the proposals of Joseph Miller, for whom the idea of the voracious appetite of the Jaga served as an excuse for slave traders who, to evade the payment of taxes due to the Crown, argued that their "wares" had been eaten by cannibals. Here, the "Jaga myth" took on another function, that of an escape valve for the private interests regarding the rich trade of captives (MILLER, 1973, p. 133-134). It emphasized, in turn, the reputation of the irksome African allies. In one of the most expressive testimonies of the politico-military conquest of Angola, António de Oliveira Cadornega summarizes the step by step stages of the long conflict, noting in various passages the bloody battles in which the Jaga took part, without ever describing scenes of cannibalism (DEMARET, 2011). Nonetheless, when he drafted the text, as if to reflect a common ground already consolidated in 1690, he presents the slave trade in the beginning of the book as a benefit to the countless Central Africans who, otherwise, could have been devoured by the Jaga:

> Pelo uso que professavam em comerem carne humana que era o seu mais regalado sustento, de que ainda tem por costume os que dahi procedem, de que he composto o quilombo da Rainha Ginga e de Cabucu e o quilombo de Casanji, potentado grande, que tem dominado pello sertão dentro muitas províncias e naçoens de diversas línguas com quem fazem os portugueses resgate de peças que servem de utilidade ao comércio, e muito mais ao serviço de Deos, e bem daquellas almas; por que com estes resgates se evitam a não haver tantos açougues de carne humana, e instruídos na fé de Nosso Senhor Jesus Cristo hindo bautizados e catequizados se embarcão para as partes do Brasil ou pra as outras que tem uso catholico tirados da gentilidade e redimindo-lhes as vidas com que se faz serviço a Deos e bem ao commercio (CADORNEGA, 1972, v. 1, p. 14)[5].

Rituals of the *Kilombo*

We now return to the text of Cavazzi de Montecúccolo and analyze it under different terms, beginning with a critique of the very idea of the Jaga as a specific ethnic group and considering the *topos* of the "cannibal Jaga" as a construction of the discourse of the European conquistadors. This conceptual review was made possible by the publication of Joseph Miller's thesis in 1976, which repositions under new terms the study of the social and state formations in the Mbundo region during the 16th and 17th centuries by articulating data from the written European documentation with input from traditionalists, from the oral traditions collected in genealogies, the *musendo*, and from the narrative episodes called *malunda*. The introduction of this wealth of material, collected partially during the 17th, 19th, and 20th centuries, has made possible to reinterpret the historical dynamics through changes brought about from African institutions, in which endogenous and exogenous social phenomena are at play. (MILLER, 1995, esp. p. 149-218).

Therefore, instead of the "myth of the Jaga", we must consider the original, and radical, historical role of a vast group of people collectively called Mbangala from the outlying areas of the Luba Empire, in Lunda territory, that prior to the 17th century had begun a slow and devastating military expansion into the region of the Cokwe and Ovimbundo people and the southeast of the Mbundo region, along the south of the Kwanza River, which dispersed themselves to the north and center of the Ndongo, the Congo, and Matamba domains. The rupture with their original lineages led to the abandonment of traditional forms of social organization, structured on family relationships of matrilineal descent, and the adoption of cross-linked relationships tied to their key activity, war. One can understand the terror infused in other people, once looting became the reason for the existence of Mbangala societies, led by chiefs who invoked their own supernatural powers.

Cavazzi de Montecúccolo and his contemporaries noted the existence, of a set of social rules among the Mbangala that defined the identity of the members of the group, which he classified as a "cult". The most appropriate term would be initiatory society, since it was not origin, but rather the adoption of individuals that determined their participation in the *kilombos*. The essential act of community building was the elimination of children, explained by different founding myths and preserved in a periodic ritual of infanticide. Through this ritual, the initial rupture of members of the group with original matrilineages became real by abolishing succession. Young people,

imprisoned in reality or symbolically, could, in turn, be admitted to the group through specific rituals of initiation.

The Capuchin friar was aware of the of the Mbangala and reproduced them in his *Istorica descrizione*, incorporating Christian moral values into them. He recreates the original scene of the ritual of infanticide in dramatic tone, attributing the creation of the custom to one of the first Mbangala leaders, Musassa, who is remembered in oral traditions like Temba Ndumba:

> Na presença de todo o povo, fez trazer sua criança e em vez de a acariciar, lançou-a furiosamente num almofariz e, com toda a força do seu cruel instinto, começou a maltratá-la, batendo-lhe com um pau, sem dó e sem compaixão pelos seus gritos. Reduzindo a carne, o sangue e os miolos a uma massa informe, juntou mais unas raízes, uns pós e umas ervas, e pôs aquela mistura sobre o lume, até ferver e se reduzir à consistência desejada. Depois untou com esta massa todo o corpo e pôs o resto nalguns recipientes. Por essa horrível cerimônia pretendeu que todos a julgassem imortal, invencível e invulnerável (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 178).

Not taking into account the judgments of the narrator added to the description, what can be inferred from the sacrificial myth is the characterization of infanticide as a form of accumulation of power, which would otherwise be transmitted to the lineage, in a ritual of "closing of the body"[6]. The child's energy, retained in the ointment called *maji-a-samba*, was transferred to whom was anointed by it, becoming a source of supernatural power. This ceremony survived in residual form for a long time among the Mbangala and, at least until the second half of the 19th century, the ceremony of ascension to power of the Kings of Kasanje was followed by a ritual called *sembamento*, or *sambamento*, that consisted of the execution (real or symbolic) of an individual, called *nicongo*, who would then be cooked together with the meat of animals and shared in a collective banquet between the king and the head of lineages, called *macotas* (CARVALHO, 1898, p. 432)[7].

Along with infanticide, anthropophagy and human sacrifice served as the basis for essential elements of the rules of coexistence among the Mbangala. These rules were called *kesila*, *kisila,* or *quijila*, from the Kimbundo language and meant, literally, "ban". For the most part, they consisted of limitations imposed on individuals and were divided, in the classification proposed by Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, into three categories: domestic, religious, and civic. According to him, the first prescribed the

observance of several traditions of the ancestors, such as a ban on the eating of pork, elephant, or snake; the second group consisted of prescriptions of sorcerers called *nganga* or *xinguila*, regarding the care of disputes, sickness, and the dangers of death; and in the third group was the ban on bringing up male children inside the *kilombo*, the adoption of boys taken in war into the community, and the practice of cannibalism, and of human sacrifice.

Cavazzi de Montecúccolo perceived the socioreligious dimension of these institutions, and in the midst of repeated demonstrations of indignation and repugnance, provides evidence of its significance for those who followed the rules of the *kilombo*. He knew that such rituals, associated with certain objects, were imbued with authority and power by symbolizing certain connections with the supernatural and with the spirits of ancestors (THORNTON, 2008, p. 88-94; THORNTON, 2004, p. 312-354; SOUZA, 2006). In one passage, he reports that the *xinguila*, the bearers of traditional religious knowledge (hence, his competitors in the sacred sphere), monopolized certain secrets that conferred the belief of invincibility to the warriors: "the *xinguila*, to gain more, teach a number of secrets to whomever they please, completely invented, and promise the indoctrinated that they never be touched, wounded, poisoned, or killed" (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 185).

Similarly, he identifies the value of worship the ancestors of the community, the dead, for whom "they carefully prepare different meals in pits corresponding to the head of the corpses, sacrificing both men and animals, so that the spirit of the dead might enter the body of the *xinguila*, "manifesting their desires and needs" (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 185-186). It is here, in the articulation between the beliefs in the ancestors and the demands of a highly militarized society, that the custom of cannibalism and human sacrifice is explained. Nevertheless, this did not happen by chance, much less as a means for food. It was integrated with periodic rituals that followed a form and produced very specific meanings for the members of the group. Moreover, the relationship between witchcraft and cannibalism could be observed in various peoples of the Kilongo and Limbundo tongues, in their belief that certain witches or kings ate the hearts of their victims to acquire power, a belief transferred to the New World in the figure of the "white cannibal" (THORTON, 2003; CHILDS, 1960, p. 276).

Defeated opponents were sacrificed on the occasion of funeral rites. According to Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, on the day of the ceremony they were crowned with

wreathes, receiving complements and courtesies from those present and prayers for their intercession on behalf of the living; and, then they were executed and eaten. Eating of human flesh seemed to be understood as a transference of vital energy, which explains why the right of eating the hearts of the main enemies was reserved for the chiefs (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 184, 195). The custom is integrated with the value systems of the ancient people of the Bantu cultural tradition, in which the universe is conceived as impregnated with energy the fluency and distribution of which motivate behaviors, give foundation to religious beliefs, develop and justify magic, and permeate social actions (ALTUNA, 2006, p. 50). This belief is reflected in the passage below, in which the Capuchin's unfavorable moral judgments do not obscure the identification of the cultural meaning probably shared among the participants of the sacrifice:

> Os jagas, para maior alívio da alma dos finados, depois de sacrificarem homens e animais, penduram os corpos das vítimas com a cabeça para baixo, sobre a campa, e cortando as cabeças, deixam que todo o sangue caia sobre a mesma. Por fim, cortam todos os outros membros para que qualquer resto de sangue seja também derramado. Durante esta supersticiosa cerimônia porém, não cuidam da sede do falecido, mas também na sua própria, pois enchem de sangue algumas taças e bebem-no avidamente (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 187).

Social Transformations

Taking into account the internal divisions of the second book of the *Istorica descrizione*, in which Cavazzi de Montecúccolo portrays the Jaga and their customs, we can consider the existence of three distinct parts in the translation of the text used here. In the first, titled "origin and expansion of the Jaga", is found a description of the old foundational customs of the community. The second, titled " beliefs and sacrifices of the Jaga", can be divided in two in terms of the subject and approach – a description of the customs that are contemporary with the narrator and, in the final part, an interpretation of religious beliefs among the Jaga of Ndongo and of Matamba – in a type of theorization of the powers attributed to the *xinguilas* and to the rituals and ceremonies labeled as "idolatry".

However, it turns out that in collecting the information and reorganizing it throughout the text, the author finds himself before phenomena marked by different temporalities, between the emergence of the Mbangala in the past, and the modifications

introduced with the structuring of the *kilombo* over a century of history. This means that, over this lapse of time, the violence of the initial institutions was attenuated by new rituals of forms of symbolization that restored, among the Mbangala, links to new lineages of chiefs or to new ancestors. Cavazzi de Montecúccolo admits, for example, the existence of a specific ritual, called *quiluvia*, performed in honor of the renowned chiefs and lords, thus transformed into an object of community reverence. Allusions to an object called *mussete*, a wooden coffer belonging to the chiefs, exhibited on solemn occasions, in which were guarded the bones of the most important deceased, to whom offerings of grain were made, are also repeated. In one of the references to this sacred object, the contents of the coffer undergoes a significant transformation, containing "idols wrapped in cloth and the skins of animals", displayed for "public veneration" (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 182; 193; 197; 208; 212). Is it possible to discern, in this case, the evolution and refinement of the worship of semi-divinized ancestors into the form of idols?

In another passage, describing a more precisely dated event, the Capuchin reports that when he entered the *kilombo* of Kasanje in 1660, the warriors were invoking the spirit of a being called Pando, that manifested itself through possession of a *xinguila*. In the preparation of the sacrifice demanded by the spirit, the flesh of two sacrificed individuals was mixed with sorghum, then cooked and distributed to those present. A few lines later, he recalls that the *xinguilas* kill men and drink their blood mixed with wine (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 208-209). In both cases, an attenuation in the description of cannibalism may be observed in the mixing of the human flesh with natural or manufactured products (sorghum, wine), probably because, by the second half of the 17th century, the Mbangala had already been in contact with sedentary and agricultural peoples and no longer lived exclusively from war. The resulting changes had repercussions in the form of social restructuring, causing the fusion and rearrangement of their religious ideas and concepts, as they became mixed with the Bakongo and Mbundo people (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 209).

Internal social evolution produced new rituals that were more consistent with the sedentarization process; gence, the existence of rituals invoking rain, favorable to the cycles of planting and harvest. The practices of infanticide or abandonment of children were replaced by ritual forms of the reintegration of children into the group, in ways that apparently did not change the old customs. These modifications can be found in the descriptions left by contemporary writers at different moments of contact with the Jaga.

While at the beginning of the 17th century, in 1601, Andrew Battell claimed to have witnessed the practice of infanticide (RAVENSTEIN, 1910, p. 32-33), nine decades later, in 1690, Cadornega reports that children are born outside the limits of the *kilombo* and then reintegrated "as if they had entered the village from some enemy tribe" (v. 3, p. 222). Such a change attests to the recuperation of two fundamental notions in African societies: the idea of succession and of belonging to a lineage.

Cavazzi de Montecúccolo attended these rituals of the reintegration of children into the bosom of the community, prevailing among the Jaga of Matamba and Kasanje in 1660. On a day set aside especially for this purpose, in the presence of the chief (*sembanza*), and his main wife (*tembanza*), and the *mussete*, the children's parents arrived dressed and adorned for the ceremony of admission of children. All present, divided into groups, acted out a battle and then simulated the kidnapping of the survivors of the combat, who, in reality, were their children. In the words of the Capuchin, at the end of the mock battle and prolonged dances:

> Saem de algumas moitas predispostas as mães que nelas estavam escondidas, com os meninos, e, mostrando-se preocupadas, com mil gestos vão ao encontro dos maridos, indicando-lhes o lugar em que cada menino está escondido. Então eles correm para lá com os arcos frechados e, descobrindo a criatura, tocam levemente nela com a seta, para demonstrar que não a consideram como filho, mas como preso de guerra, e que, portanto, a lei não fica violada. Depois, usando uma perna de galinha, untam a criança com aquele ungüento no peito, nos lombos e no braço direito. Desta maneira, os pequenos são julgados purificados e podem ser introduzidos pelas mães no quilombo na noite seguinte (MONTECÚCCOLO, 1965, I, p. 182).

The times of cannibalism and infanticide among the Mbangala had passed.

Final Considerations

In closing, it should be recognized that a careful evaluation of the information provided by Cavazzi de Montecúccolo must take into account several aspects that, in our view, put him in a more just and balanced position as a direct witness of the social realities of Central Africa in the second half of the 17th century.

Notwithstanding the cultural deformations or partial interpretations, frankly unfavorable to the people that he intended to portray, due to the limitations imposed by the Euro-Christian lens, he spent several years among the Mbangala and, in addition to

being an eyewitness, he had the privilege of collecting information directly from the subjects he hoped to convert. For all this, all the information provided must be strictly scrutinized in order to identify probable cultural interferences in his enunciation and to relativize the degree of objectivity presented. Nevertheless, its value as historical testimony must never be rejected due to the privileged position of the author within the society that he portrayed. It is better, it seems, to try to detect the ethnographic substrata that he presents, reinserting them, to the extent possible, into the context in which they actually existed.

On the other hand, the redemption of the role of the Mbangala in the historical context of Central West Africa from the 16th to 17th centuries positively contributes to the deepening of our knowledge concerning the different processes of social transformation responsible for the weakening and loss of influence of the Kingdom of Ndongo. Their entry into the Mbundo region, along the Kwanza River, occurred more or less in the same period as the arrival of the Portuguese on the scene. The articulation between these two groups of foreigners weighed decisively in the reduction of authority of the traditional Mbundo rulers, the *ngola*, and in the appearance of a new set of African states, like Matamba and Kasanje, that, together with the Portuguese state of Angola, actively participated in the transatlantic slave trade.

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Notes

1 In the interpretation of GONÇALVES (2005), such measures significantly changed the politico-social model that was in force until that time in the Congo, creating a new political reality and introducing inexistent notions, in particular: the idea of territoriality associated with its authority as a ruler; the notion of a dynastic direct line of succession in a patrilinear and patrilocal lineage; and the formation of a court, the politico-cultural entity based on a model provided by Christianity.

2 In this text, the designation Angola will be used to refer to the effective area of Portuguese occupation until the mid-17th century, located mainly between the fortresses of São Paulo de Luanda and Massangano, and practically limited to the coast, which coincided with several states in the Mbundo and Ovimbundo areas.

3 Among several documents, refer to the *Relação de António Diniz*, of 1622 (BRÁSIO, v. 7, p. 70), in which a functionary of the Luso-Spanish Crown defends the legitimacy of collecting taxes on what was fished on a yearly basis on the Island of Luanda in the name of the King of Portugal, based on a supposed granting of this right by Álvaro I, "from the time that you rescued the kingdom that the Jaga had taken".

4 In 17th century Central Africa, this word of Kimbundo origin had two meanings, which were oscillating and interchangeable. Firstly, it meant a village, a more or less permanent defensive camp, with a military purpose. Secondly, it signified the idea of gathering, of union between certain individuals, widespread in the Congo, Matamba, Ndongo, and in the Ovimbundo states of the current day Central Angolan Plateau, where it probably had its origin (PARREIRA, 1990, p. 153).

5 On the beginning of the work's third part (CADORNEGA, 1972, v. 3, p. 222-230), where it describes the institutions that would be referred to as "jagado de Kasanje", it mentions some of the customs and rites concerning the jagas, also, indicating the habit of human flesh consumption in a vague and generic way.

6 According to Joseph Miller (1995, p. 163), in oral traditions the ceremony of killing a son or daughter, symbolized absolute power of the ruler over his subjects, since "children", in the narrative, represent the subjects of a political leader, in contrast to his relatives who were always described as "nephews and nieces". In a more literal sense, however, the killing of children, when practiced by an entire population, became a means to abolish lineages, since the murder of children (or the negation of the meaning of physical birth) had the same structural effect on kinship groups as a prohibition on their birth.

7 Note that, in ancient Mbundo traditions, the words *samba* or *semba* were related to the principle titles of the rulers of the *kilombo*, *sambanza* for the husbands and *tembanza* for the wives.

Received in March/2013
Approved in May/2013