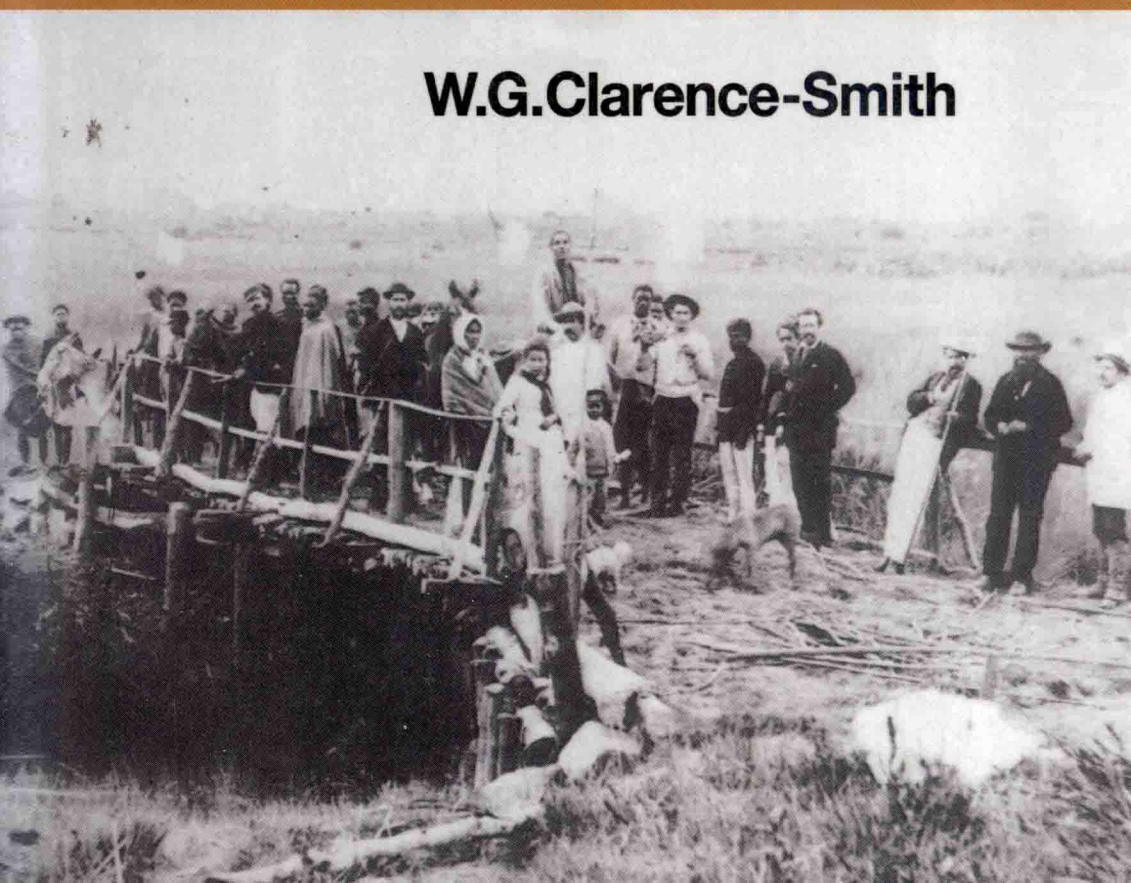


Slaves, peasants and capitalists in southern Angola 1840-1926

W.G.Clarence-Smith



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Preface

A great deal has been written about southern Angola between 1840 and 1926, but almost always within the framework of a narrow colonialist historiography. Portuguese writers of the Salazarist era presented a picture of their colonies which was ordered around the process of *portugalização*, an ugly neologism which can be translated as 'portuguesification'. This process was further broken down into three broad phases: discovery, conquest and assimilation. Southern Angola was associated with the feats of the nineteenth-century Portuguese explorers of central Africa, and the area was particularly famous as the scene of the exploits of the military heroes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whose names still adorn so many of the streets and squares of Portuguese towns. The development of a deeply-rooted white settler community and the evangelizing efforts of catholic missionaries were also used as illustrations of the assimilationist theme and as foundations for the hopes of a new Brazil. The publications of Ralph Delgado, Gastão Sousa Dias and Alfredo de Albuquerque Felner are probably the best and most painstaking examples of this kind of historiography.

A first attempt at writing a quite different history of southern Angola was made in my doctoral thesis, which was presented to the University of London in 1975 under the title 'Mossamedes and its hinterland, 1875–1915'. The present book is based on this thesis, but the two texts differ very substantially. The thesis put forward detailed research findings in a set of chronologically ordered chapters. Portuguese colonial policy provided the main integrating theme, and there was no systematic theoretical interpretation of the material. The problems of resistance and collaboration on the part of African societies assumed a prominent place, in spite of expressed dissatisfaction as to the utility of such concepts. In brief, the thesis did little more than elaborate a general history of the area, with a much greater stress on African societies than was the rule in colonialist historiography.

Preface

The present book has been entirely rewritten. Chapters are divided thematically, and descriptive narrative has been cut down very substantially. Portuguese colonial policy is treated separately in a short chapter, and the main emphasis is laid on the economic and social structures of local social formations. The time-span covered by the thesis has been roughly doubled in order to analyse the whole process of colonial conquest. The epilogue has also been expanded and ameliorated so as to give an outline of more recent developments. Considerable additional research has been carried out in the secondary literature to this end.

From the theoretical point of view, I have relied heavily on recent marxist writings, not only in the historical field but also in the social sciences. I have tried to analyse Portuguese colonial policy in terms of the classes and fractions of classes which struggled to control the state apparatus, and I hope to develop this theme considerably in future publications. A class analysis is made of the local colonial society in southern Angola, and I have attempted to employ the concepts developed by the French school of marxist anthropology in order to grasp developments in African peasant societies. In short, I have used a number of recently elaborated theoretical concepts to make a concrete analysis of a concrete situation.

The sources consulted were entirely of an archival or published nature. I made no attempt to collect oral traditions, partly because I had difficulties in obtaining a visa for a sufficient length of time and partly because of growing doubts as to the value of oral traditions for the historian. This latter problem is discussed in my recent article in *History in Africa*,¹ and further details on archives may be found in my thesis. Here, it is sufficient to say that the major archival and library collections for this study consisted of the administrative archives in Lisbon and Luanda, mission archives in Paris, the newspapers held in the Câmara Municipal de Moçâmedes, and the libraries of the British Museum, the School of Oriental and African Studies, the Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa and the University of Zambia (concentrated stacks). Additional archival research since the thesis was completed was carried out in the National Archives of Zambia, the Manuscript Collection of the Livingstone Museum, the Pretoria archives and the Public Record Office.

Both primary and secondary sources for this area are plentiful. Indeed, they are considerably more abundant than the poverty and small population of the area would seem to warrant. This is due to the fact that southern Angola was a sensitive frontier area which proved difficult to conquer, and also to the presence of white settlers and missionaries from an early period. Southern Angola has been fortunate as well in the treat-

¹ Clarence-Smith, 1977a.

Preface

ment it has received at the hands of scholars of other disciplines, notably ethnographers and geographers.

I would like to end by expressing my thanks to all those who helped me in the writing of thesis and book. The Department of Education and Science made the whole project financially viable and was very generous with travel grants. The School of Oriental and African Studies and the University of London (Central Research Funds) made appreciable extra grants for maintenance and travel respectively. Professor Roland Oliver supervised the writing of the thesis with patient care and made many valuable suggestions. Dr David Birmingham originally proposed the topic and helped me with many points of detail, as well as guiding me through the archives of Luanda. Professor Joseph Miller, Professor Franz-Wilhelm Heimer, Dr René Pélisser, Father António Brásio and the late Father Charles Estermann all made available to me the fruits of their detailed knowledge of Angolan affairs. Father Bernard Noël opened the archives of the Holy Ghost Fathers to me and gave me much of his precious time. I would also like to thank the innumerable people who helped me in one way or another and who are too numerous to mention. However, particular thanks are due to Jill and Alberto Dias, René Naville, Margaret and John Davis, Frank Hollis, Victor Jorge, Nuno Ferreira, Renato Mascarenhas, Jorge de Figueiredo, Ian Frazer, Richard Moorsom, Roger Wagner and Sue Newton-King. Finally, I owe an especial debt of gratitude to my sister, Annette Elliot, who typed the original thesis version with infinite patience.

Note on proper names

Geographical names are spelt according to standard local cartographic usage (e.g. Caconda not Kakonda). In cases where more than one name is current, the most commonly used form in English has been adopted (e.g. Okavango not Cubango). Modern Portuguese orthography has been used throughout (e.g. Moçâmedes not Mossamedes). Where names have been changed, the form current during the period under consideration is retained (e.g. South West Africa not Namibia).

Names of African peoples are spelt according to standard international Bantu usage (e.g. Cokwe and not Chokwe or Tshokwe). Plural prefixes for African names are not employed (e.g. Kwanyama not Ovakwanyama), except in a few cases where it has become established usage to do so (e.g. Ovambo).

Note on currency

Portuguese currency has been converted into pounds sterling throughout, in order to avoid the problems posed by the fluctuations of Portuguese currency and in order to facilitate comparisons with the southern African region as a whole. The smallest unit of currency was the *real*, plural *reis*. In 1910, a new unit was introduced, the *escudo*, worth 1,000 *reis*. Statistics were often expressed in *contos*, an accounting unit worth 1,000,000 *reis* or 1,000 *escudos*.

Before 1861, the so-called weak *reis* were used in Angola, the value of which was slowly falling in relation to the metropolitan *reis*. In the 1850s, there were about 7,000 weak *reis* to the pound. From 1861 to 1891, metropolitan *reis* were used, with a fixed official parity of 4,500 *reis* to the pound, although actual exchange rates were often more favourable to the pound. After 1891, Portugal was effectively off the gold standard, and the exchange rate until 1919 fluctuated between 4,500 *reis* and 8,000 *reis*. This was followed by a period of hyperinflation, so that in 1924 there were 127,500 *reis* to the pound, although this had dropped again to 95,000 by 1926. A further complication is introduced by the fact that the pound itself fell rapidly in terms of its purchasing power between 1914 and 1920, and then rose again slowly during the 1920s. Moreover, there existed a separate Angolan *escudo* in the 1920s, worth only about 80% of the metropolitan *escudo*. An almost complete set of exchange rates were obtained for the period after 1891, but figures for the years before 1861 are very scarce. For precise references, see the list of sources.

In view of these complications and of the doubtful reliability of many statistics, all figures should be taken as no more than rough approximations. Figures have been rounded up or down in order to remove all illusion of precision.

Abbreviations

AGCSSp	Archives Générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit
AHA	Arquivo Histórico de Angola (Av: Avulsos; Cod: Códices)
AHM	Arquivo Histórico Militar (P: Pasta)
AHMH	Arquivo Histórico do Museu da Huíla
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (R: Repartição; P: Pasta)
AMAE	Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (CP: Correspondance Politique; NS: Nouvelle Série)
<i>AS</i>	<i>Annual Series</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>Bulletin Général</i>
<i>BO</i>	<i>Boletim Oficial</i>
<i>C de M</i>	<i>Correio de Mossamedes</i>
CG	Curador Geral
DGU	Direcção Geral do Ultramar
FO	Foreign Office
GB	Governador de Benguela
GG	Governador Geral
GH	Governador da Huíla
GM	Governador de Moçâmedes
<i>J de M</i>	<i>Jornal de Mossamedes</i>
NAZ	National Archives of Zambia
<i>P em A</i>	<i>Portugal em Africa</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
TRP	Très Révérend Père

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	vi
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Note on proper names</i>	x
<i>Note on currency</i>	xi
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xii
<i>Introduction</i>	1
1 Land and peoples	7
2 The colonial context	12
3 The economy of the colonial nucleus	21
4 Society and politics in the colonial nucleus	35
5 The peasant economy	58
6 Peasant societies	72
7 Epilogue	97
<i>Maps and graphs</i>	105
<i>Sources and bibliography</i>	116
<i>Index</i>	128

Illustrations

Maps

1	Southern Angola – physical features	105
2	Southern Angola – ethnic groups	106
3	Southern Angola – economic c. 1905	107
4	Southern Angola – economic c. 1970	108
5	Coastal population cluster	109
6	Nyaneka population cluster	110
7	The flood plains	111

Graphs

1	Exports of fish products through Moçâmedes and its fiscal dependencies, 1875–1926	112
2	Exports of raw cotton through Moçâmedes and its fiscal dependencies 1858–1926	113
3	Exports of cattle products through Moçâmedes and its fiscal dependencies, 1875–1926	114
4	Exports of rubber and <i>almeidina</i> through Moçâmedes and its fiscal dependencies, 1882–1918	115

Introduction

Although this book is primarily a case study of a limited area and period, it must also be placed briefly in the context of two influential schools of historiography current in the 1960s, which can be labelled 'African nationalist' and 'uneconomic imperialist'. The 'African nationalist' school has provided a view of the colonial epoch which makes the imposition and eventual withdrawal of European rule the fundamental points of historical reference. African resistance or collaboration then form archetypal social processes, which subsume all others. These responses are further subdivided according to the categories of modern or traditional and élite or mass.

Such an approach has been rejected as unsatisfactory, because the concepts employed are imprecise in the extreme, and because the absolute predominance of the political level is simply assumed. African and European are effectively racial categories, and traditional and modern are distinguished according to the vague criterion of the assimilation of western cultural features. As for the terms élite and masses, they rarely mean any more than the few and the many. At no point does one get a clear analysis of the economic interests of different classes and fractions of classes, of the political means which such groups adopt in order to further their perceived interests, and of the ideological constructs which underpin political and economic struggles.

In this case study, an attempt is therefore made to grasp the social processes in the colonial epoch more clearly by making a class analysis. A primary distinction is drawn between a local colonial social formation, which was characterized by the dominance of capitalist relations of production, and a cluster of tributary peasant social formations, in which pre-capitalist relations of production continued to predominate. The class structure of colonial society is analysed in chapters 3 and 4, while the resistance to class formation in peasant societies is the major theme of chapters 5 and 6. At the same time, the nature and evolution of the

unequal relationship between an expanding colonial nucleus and dominated peasant societies are kept constantly in mind. In this way, it is hoped that a number of neglected or controversial issues have been placed in a clearer perspective.

One of the most neglected but currently controversial issues facing independent Angola is that of the development of a true proletariat. Vague terms such as 'working class' evade the crucial issue of the extent to which labourers have become divorced from the means of production. In this study, it is argued that a proletariat developed very precociously in parts of southern Angola, as a result of the effective maintenance of quasi-slavery until 1913. Slaves were uprooted from their communities of origin, lost all rights in peasant societies, and became totally dependent on wage labour in the colonial nucleus when they were freed. But as soon as a more normal African pattern of recurrent migrant labour was established, this particular process of proletarianization was halted. A much more diffuse and slow form of proletarianization ensued, the rate and intensity of which was dependent on the capacity of African peasant societies to continue ensuring the reproduction of the labour force outside capitalist relations of production. In simpler terms, the rate and level of proletarianization depended on the relative importance which wages assumed for the subsistence of peasants and their families. The early stages of this process are examined in chapters 5 and 6, in conjunction with the growth and decline of petty commodity production for the market. In the epilogue, two examples are given of peasant societies which had reached an advanced level of proletarianization by the 1970s.

A second problem which still generates much controversy concerns the nature and roots of ethnic and racial antagonisms within central colonial societies. In this study, it is suggested that such antagonisms sprang largely from the economic insecurity of petty bourgeois elements in colonial society, who were constantly threatened with proletarianization and struggling to break out of a vicious circle of debt. Racial and ethnic factors were thus used by sectors of the petty bourgeoisie to increase their own security at the expense of others. An attempt is therefore made to distinguish as clearly as possible the different fractions within this highly complex and varied class. It is further argued that the racism of the local capitalist class was of a different origin, being principally concerned with control of the labour force and the forging of political alliances with certain sectors of the petty bourgeoisie.

Thirdly, the vexed problem of the nature of pre-capitalist or non-capitalist relations of production in peasant societies is examined. A model of a lineage mode of production is sketched out, which stresses the communal ownership of the means of production, the apportioning of

labour power according to kinship, the relatively egalitarian redistribution of surplus product and the low level of development of the forces of production. It is argued that the central historical process within such societies is not the class struggle as such, for constituted classes do not exist, but rather the attempt by certain groups to turn themselves into an exploitative class, and the resistance to such a process by other groups. On balance, it is suggested that resistance to class formation was very effective, even in as extreme a case as the Ovambo, who at first sight seem to provide an example of a transition to feudal relations of production. With the generalization of colonial rule, the resistance to class formation was generally buttressed by colonial policies which aimed at securing a satisfactory flow of cheap migrant labour.

The second influential school of historiography which has been rejected in writing this book is that which contends that Portuguese colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not economically motivated. According to this school, Portugal was an underdeveloped and backward nation, which inherited colonial possessions in Africa by historical accident and set out to expand them for reasons of humiliated national pride, in spite of the fact that these colonies were a constant and heavy burden on the finances of an already poor country. The explanation for this phenomenon is held to be that the Portuguese ruling class was seeking a rather indistinct set of social, political and ideological gratifications, which are subsumed under the general category of 'Veblenian conspicuous consumption'.

Southern Angola would appear to provide a classic illustration of the theory of uneconomic imperialism. The budgetary deficits of the region were consistently the largest in the colony, often turning a positive balance into a negative one. The natural poverty of the region and the effective military resistance of its peoples to colonial conquest meant that millions of pounds were spent for no apparent reward. At the same time, the foreign-owned chartered Companhia de Moçâmedes proved a resounding economic failure. This study is not centrally concerned with these problems, but they are considered briefly in chapter 2 and they are essential to the general context of the book. A number of objections to the theory of uneconomic imperialism are therefore set out below.

The first objection is really a very simple point of logic, namely that the lack of economic returns in no way suffices to prove a lack of economic motivations. Colonies were seen by all European powers in the nineteenth century as speculative long-term investments, which might not provide any immediate profits and which might indeed never provide any profits at all. In southern Angola, the Portuguese government genuinely believed that the Cassinga gold mines could turn out to be a 'second Rand',

thus compensating manyfold for the initial losses incurred in conquering the region. Similarly, the Portuguese appeared for a brief moment to have found their eldorado during the ephemeral whaling boom of the 1910s.

A more important point is that public deficits must be carefully distinguished from private profits. The state did not incarnate some disembodied national interest, but was the subject of intense conflict between classes and fractions of classes. The powerful groups with strong interests in colonial expansion are briefly examined in chapter 2. To be sure, these groups also paid some of the taxes which were used to pay colonial deficits, but taxes came mainly from other groups and classes. In more general terms, recent research in the field of Portuguese history indicates that the intensification of capitalist relations of production as a whole in Portugal in the late nineteenth century owed a great deal to the existence of protected colonial markets. Southern Angola provided markets for Portuguese textiles, wines and other goods, was included in the sphere of operations of monopolies in the fields of banking and communications, and produced cheap cotton, hides and other raw materials for metropolitan industries. Another minor point, which is easily forgotten, is that many ecclesiastical and military cadres made fine careers owing to their 'heroic' exploits in southern Angola, including some of the individuals who were involved in the military coup of 1926, which put Salazar in power.

Of more central relevance to the present study is the fact that a vigorous group of local colonial capitalists developed, who were crucially concerned with influence over the state apparatus and who have too often been forgotten by the theorists of uneconomic imperialism. In southern Angola, local entrepreneurs depended on the state in the vital question of labour, firstly for the maintenance of quasi-slavery to 1913 and then for the extraction of cheap labour from peasant societies by taxation and forced labour. Commercial capitalists, to the extent that these were distinct from entrepreneurs, needed the state to guarantee security in the interior, to invest in communications infrastructures and to enforce a system of exchange which maximized their profits. The local capitalist class of southern Angola was able to exert substantial political influence in Lisbon – but this is a subject which would require considerably more research.

In a broader perspective, it is hoped that the conceptual framework adopted for this study will prove useful for understanding some of the present problems of the People's Republic of Angola and of other African countries which are attempting social transformations inspired by marxism. In particular, the approach taken in this book underlines the com-

Introduction

plexities and difficulties inherent in the task of socialist construction. Like other African states, Angola is still far from constituting a single homogeneous social formation, and the problems of transition to socialism are qualitatively different in the central ex-colonial society as compared to the tributary peasant societies. Furthermore, the problem of the structure of exploitation of peasant societies by the central society does not disappear with independence, and it needs to be adequately conceptualized to be resolved. Finally, the central society which has been taken over by the independent Angolan government is still very weak, limited and dependent on the core areas of the capitalist world.

