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# Manicongo, Francisco

(fl. sixteenth–seventeenth centuries)



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originally from the kingdom of Congo, was a slave in Bahia, Brazil, who was accused by the Portuguese Inquisition of 1591 of “committing acts of sodomy and refusing to dress as a man” (Mendoça, 1925 , pp. 406–407). He is considered Brazil’s first cross-dresser. Nothing is known of his early life.

During the first inquest of the Portuguese Inquisition in northeast Brazil, Matias Moreira, an old Christian guard from Lisbon, denounced Francisco Manicongo, shoemaker and slave of Antonio Pires, because he “was known among the blacks of the city to be a sodomite” and because Moreira “saw him dressed in only a fitted longshirt, worn in a fashion with the points tied up around the waist, which is how sodomites in the lands of Angola and Congo are known to dress when they take [on] the role of patient/submissive/receiving woman,” called “*quimbanda* in that tongue” (Mendoça, 1925 , pp. 406–407). Having seen Manicongo attired in this manner, Moreira reproached him because he did not wear the men’s clothes his master had provided, instead donning the shirt of the *quimbandas*. Moreira also observed him two or three other times around the city dressed in a similar way.

During this same Inquisitorial inquest in Bahia in 1591, a “negro of Guinee” was denounced for having a same-sex lover: “Joane, son of an Angolan gentile, inhabitant of Matoim River, who committed the aforementioned sin acts as a woman.” After being warned that sodomy “was a sin that warranted burning,” Joane responded in his defense that Francisco Manicongo also committed the same sin with other blacks and had not been burned at the stake as a result. From such testimony, it is clear that Francisco Manicongo carried with him from Africa to Bahia the tradition of the *quimbanda* already long established in the lands of Congo and Angola (Mendoça, 1925 , pp. 406–407).

Two European authors unequivocally confirm the existence of an established homoerotic subculture in the kingdom of Angola in the seventeenth century. The first of these was the Italian capuchin monk Giovanni Antonio Cavazzi de Montecúcolo (1621–1678). In both volumes of *Descrição histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola* (Historical Description of Three Kingdoms: Congo, Matamba, and Angola) published in 1687, he writes:

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Among the sorcerers, there is one who does not deserve to be remembered but whose omission would undermine the knowledge of future missionaries, for whom I write this report. His name is *ngango-ia quimbanda*, or “priest in charge of sacrifices.” This man, in complete contradistinction to the priests of the One True God, is morally dirty, corrupt, impudent, shameless, and beast-like in such a way that among the inhabitants of the Pentápolis [the five neighboring cities which are said to have been destroyed by God along with Sodom and Gomorrah, as punishment for homosexual activity, among other things] he would be in first place. As part of his role, he dresses like a woman and uses female mannerisms, calling himself the “great mother.” When one of these sorcerers dies, the oldest living member of his cult gathers together all the people to commemorate his funeral. This ritual continues until nightfall, at which point only cult members remain, using the cloak of darkness to hide their dissolute practices.

(Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, 1965 , pp. 202–203)

The second written record of the *quimbanda* came from Captain Antônio de Oliveira Cadornega in his *História geral das guerras Angolanas* (General History of the Angolan Wars, 1681). Having lived in Portuguese Africa for forty years, he was an especially valuable source and also less of a moralist than Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, his contemporary. As Cadornega writes:

There is much sodomy among the people of Angola and they have among them their dissolute and filthy practices, and dressing like women. They call *quimbandas* those who, in the district or in the lands where they reside, have congress with one another. And some of them are adroit sorcerers and are well-respected and the people are careful not to offend them in any matter. And if one of this gang dies, the others come together for his funeral and no person is allowed to come near the body, or to touch it, save those of that dark and dirty profession. And when they take the body out of the house to bury it they do not take it out by the front door, but instead by the back door. It is members of this same caste who then prepare the body for burial and, as we said before, no outsider may approach the body. These men are always clean-shaven and because of that appear castrated, and dress as women.

(Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, 1965 , p. 259)

There is no recorded information about the circumstances of Manicongo’s death.

## Bibliography

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