



AFRICA IN MOVIMENTO / AFRICA ON THE MOVE

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TITLE: THE APOTHEOSIS OF DR. LACERDA: A COLONIAL MYTHEME ON THE MOVE

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ABSTRACT:

When the Portuguese explorer Francisco José de Lacerda e Almeida died at the court of the Mwata Kazembe (a Kingdom occupied by modern-day Zambia) in 1798 – leaving his papers and the command of his expedition to his chaplain, Father Pinto – he could never have guessed that his work would be at the kernel of an intense exchange of ideas between the theorizers of the Portuguese and the British African empires, throughout the 19th century. Eager to promote an expansionist reform of the Portuguese Empire loosely based on the new tendencies evinced by the post-abolitionist Victorian Empire, Portuguese statesman and chief abolitionist Viscount Sá da Bandeira promoted the diffusion of Lacerda's journals and letters, only to draw the attention and competition of the international community towards the territories he was eager to annex. In 1873, the same Richard Burton that translated the *One Thousand and One Nights* and the *Kama Sutra*, publishes *The Lands of Cazembe – Lacerda's Journey to Cazembe in 1798*, a translation of the various sources the Portuguese had mobilized to justify their colonial aspirations during the 19th century, further fixating British attention towards an area already under close scrutiny, due to David Livingstone's last journey. Throughout this period of time – from 1798 to 1873 – Lacerda's narratives journeyed to-and-fro Portugal and the British isles, becoming the justification of different, and most of the times opposing Imperial claims. Interestingly, Lacerda himself was born in São Paulo (then part of colonial Brazil), and, after coming into contact with Captain Cook's journals, loosely based his writing on the experiences of this charismatic British explorer.

This paper aims to trace the ways in which a given mytheme (Lacerda's journeys and final apotheosis – itself owing a lot to Cook's narratives of his misfortunes and adventures) travels through two Imperial contexts, demonstrating how the flow of ideas about Africa sometimes took place in an unexpected circular motion.

AUTHOR'S ACADEMIC PROFILE:

João de Castro Maia Veiga Figueiredo has both portuguese and angolan citizenship, and is a doctoral research fellow at the *Centro de História da Sociedade e da Cultura* of the University of Coimbra (Centre for the History of Society and Culture), Portugal, with a public funded studentship from the *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* (Foundation for Science and Technology). His PhD dissertation is entitled *Política e Feitiçaria em Angola – sec. XVIII e XIX* (Politics and Witchcraft in Angola – 18th and 19th centuries), and his current research interests are related to the history of the concept of *feitiço* (roughly fetish) and *feitiçaria* (roughly witchcraft) in the Portuguese African colonies and in Brazil. He publishes mainly in Portuguese and Brazilian State and Federal university journals (in Portuguese), but has also made a few papers and presentations in English.



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