



A 'NATIONAL STYLE' OF COMBATING SLEEPING SICKNESS? MASS ATOXYLIZATION IN INTERWAR ANGOLA

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Abstract

This paper examines how the anti-trypanosomic drug atoxyl became the cornerstone of a 'new' preventive approach in the combat against sleeping sickness in Interwar Angola. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the *Assistência Médica aos Indígenas* service regularly injected tens of thousands of healthy Africans with this controversial arsenic compound in order to contain and even eradicate the disease. While some leading doctors in Angola framed mass atoxylization as a 'Portuguese method' and panacea, this approach was criticized by doctors in neighbouring colonies and also increasingly by doctors in Angola itself, until it was abandoned in the early 1930s. In its analysis of the debate on mass atoxylization, this paper shows how the discussions were underwritten by often conflicting ideas of nationalism, exceptionalism and representation. It also questions the idea of 'national styles' in the combat against sleeping sickness (Worboys). It also uses the example of mass atoxylization to argue that, more than national medical styles supposedly defined by powerful medical institutions in European metropolises, local circumstances such as epidemiological patterns, environmental constraints, material conditions as well as specific transcolonial connections were mostly decisive in defining approaches against sleeping sickness 'on the ground'.