



## **The Razor's Edge: Portuguese Imperial Vulnerability in Colonial Moxico, Angola**

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## THE RAZOR'S EDGE: PORTUGUESE IMPERIAL VULNERABILITY IN COLONIAL MOXICO, ANGOLA\*

By *Ricardo Roque*

Vulnerable: that which can be hurt or damaged.<sup>1</sup>

This article is about colonial vulnerability and how it was managed in practice. In December 1904, Portuguese army officer Artur da Fonseca Cardoso left his position as *capitão-mór* (chief captain) of Moxico, a distant Eastern hinterland province of colonial Angola, to begin his return journey to Benguela on the Angolan coast and then on to Portugal. *Capitão-mór* was an important position in the emergent colonial system, but Cardoso was certainly happy to return home after two years fighting in Africa. He had arrived in Angola in 1902 as a captain in the military expedition to quell the famous Bailundo rebellion of the Ovimbundos.<sup>2</sup> After the end of the conflict, his promotion to *capitão-mór* of Moxico acknowledged his good service to the empire.

Crossing the hinterland from Moxico to Benguela by foot was a long, difficult, and dangerous journey. On the eve of the twentieth century this was the only way to reach the coast from the Eastern Angolan border. Military occupation in the hinterland was a recent, and relatively ineffective political effort dating from the mid-1890s. State administration was practically absent; no roads or bridges were constructed; no credible maps of the region were available; and the railway network from Luanda only reached the Eastern province in 1913, and the border in 1929.<sup>3</sup>

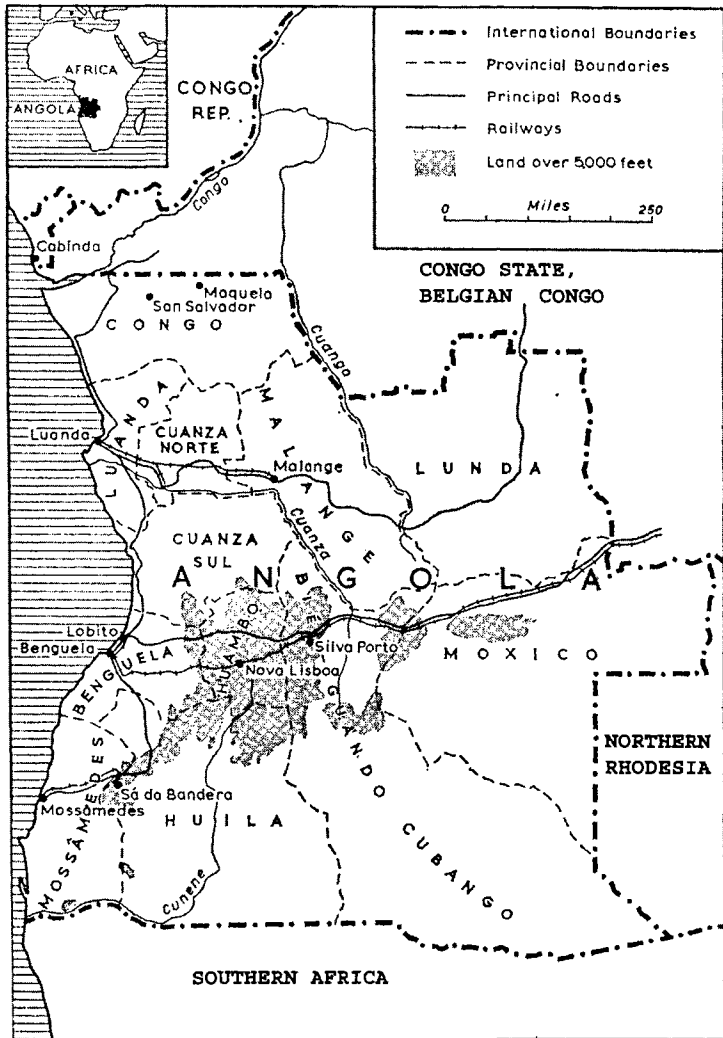
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<sup>1</sup> "Vulnerável: que pode ser ferido ou sofrer dano." H. Brunswick, ed., *Diccionário da antiga linguagem portuguesa. Intercalado com grande numero de vocábulos hodiernos de obscura significação* (Lisbon, 1910), 328. All passages originally in Portuguese and French have been translated into English by the author.

<sup>2</sup> René Pélissier, *História das campanhas de Angola. Resistência e revoltas, 1845–1941* (Lisbon, 1986), II, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, II, 116; Jill Dias, "Angola," in Valentim Alexandre and Jill Dias, eds., *O império africano, 1825–1890* (Lisbon, 1998), 395; Jill Dias, "Relações portuguesas com as sociedades africanas em Angola no século XIX," in Valentim Alexandre, ed., *O império africano (séculos XIX e XX)* (Lisbon, 2000), 69–93; Aida Faria Freudenthal, "Angola," in A. H. de Oliveira Marques, ed., *O império africano, 1890–1930* (Lisbon, 2001), 259–467.



**Colonial Angola in the Twentieth Century**

Based on Anders Ehnmark and Per Wästberg, *Angola and Mozambique; The Case Against Portugal* (London, 1963), 10.

In the early nineteenth century, Portuguese "effective occupation" was actually limited to a few towns and "kingdoms" near the coast, the Angola and Benguela "kingdoms" around Luanda and Benguela; and the white colony of Moçâmedes, in the south.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, intelligence information was scarce, since only a minimally centralized political administration existed in Luanda. Communications between the interior, the capital city, and the coastline were slow and erratic; dependent upon moving large groups of people, supplies, and animals across dense jungle and treacherous rivers. Mules, oxen, and numerous porters had to be assembled in order to carry the essentials for the journey: food, guns, tents, clothes, and textiles to offer as gifts to political leaders in exchange for permission to cross their lands.<sup>5</sup> Unless these materials were put together, white men's survival in Angolan travels was scarcely possible. Historian René Pélissier asserted that the existence of a "Portuguese Moxico during the times of occupation" (i.e., between 1892 and 1917) was "more an international convention than a concrete reality, for the border, fictitious, was only a passage to some lands that British *indirect rule* also left carelessly administered [Rhodesia]."<sup>6</sup>

Colonial imagery of domination, superiority, or hegemony hardly fit the Portuguese presence in Moxico. This imagery is inadequate to describe or explain their presence as imminently *colonial*—and the same might be true for the anticolonial rhetorics of resistance.<sup>7</sup> One needs to forge concepts that enable us to speak of this sort of colonialism without depending on hegemonic or resistance narratives. Recent literature approaches the analytical validity of understandings of colonialism as a successful hegemonic project with skepticism. The trope of colonialism's dynamics of weakness seems to have been taken seriously. In his account of infor-

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<sup>4</sup> Dias, "Relações portuguesas," 69.

<sup>5</sup> Jill Dias stresses that nineteenth-century Luanda businessmen were certain that "commercial success in the inland depended mainly on the control of African carriers, for the inland rivers were inadequate for long-distance navigation. The problem of recruiting carriers for European commerce, always important, became even more crucial in the economic context of the mid-nineteenth century.... From the 1840s to 1870s the hunt for carriers was insatiable, due to the rising prices and the increasing trade of export goods, which contributed to an atmosphere of intensive competition between the traders at all social and political levels, particularly in the north of Cuanza." Dias, "Angola," 394–95.

<sup>6</sup> Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, II, 116; emphasis in the original.

<sup>7</sup> It is revealing that Pélissier, himself an assumed historian of colonialism "from the point of view" of the African resistance, explained the seeming incoherence and fragility of the occupation of Angola by condemning Portuguese colonialism as "irresponsible," unable to control "a colonial exploitation that was done before everyone's eyes, i.e., that was not supported by a force respected as powerful or even fair." Portuguese presence was thus a sort of morally evil colonialism derived from a lack in the strength of statecraft. Yet while exposing the history of colonial struggles, Pélissier never doubted that Portuguese colonialism, even led by such "an underdeveloped" European state, was superior: "it could always count on technical and material superiority, as well as professional superiority, therefore compensating for the inferiority of the natives." Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, I, 206–207.

mation within the British colonial order in India, C. A. Bayly underlines the dynamic character of what he calls "information panics," stressing how the weakness, fear, and ignorance of colonizers worked as key elements in the production of colonial knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Ann Stoler marked the conceptual shift away from colonialism as "successful hegemonic project" to "the instabilities and vulnerabilities of colonial regimes" as a new crucial movement in the field of colonial studies, a movement that she addresses in her recent work on the colonial intimate.<sup>9</sup> By the same token, "colonial discourse," once a peaceful object of enquiry, is under criticism, while material practices and the fractured nature of colonialism are calling for the attention of historians.<sup>10</sup> One calls for the importance of bringing to light the contextual complexities of practice that make colonialism(s) a set of heterogeneous, conflicting, and internally contradictory projects. Moreover, the colonial dichotomies of colonizer/colonized have been left behind, while colonialism is now better imagined, for example, as a co-product of Western and indigenous agencies, and an internally fractured entity. Approaches drawn from the readings of Foucault and of Said's *Orientalism* were targeted for their undue focus on discourse as an object of inquiry, for detaching text from its historical context and locales and for overstressing the hegemonic structure of colonialism. In contrast, some scholars seem now to appeal for a broader sensitivity to practice—including narrative as well as non-verbal practices.<sup>11</sup> The roots of colonialism as local and small-scaled can be investigated in

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<sup>8</sup> "British assessments of crime, religion, and native lethargy were more often reflections of the weakness and ignorance of the colonisers than a gauge of hegemony." C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Information in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996), 143.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002), 10. "Our readings of colonial archives," Stoler states in her conclusion, "can recoup those sites in which common sense was crafted to understand the vulnerabilities of these imperial projects and the fears they engendered." Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 216. Stoler mentions "vulnerability" as a trope for historical study. In this essay I try to elaborate specifically on its conceptual potential.

<sup>10</sup> Attempts to re-evaluate postcolonial theory and the empirical study of colonialism in this direction include Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Cambridge, 1994); Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," in Nicholas Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1995), 317–40; Bayly, *Empire and Information*; Frederic Cooper and Ann Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997); Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London, 1999); Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*. For a strongly critical review of postcolonial discourse theory, see also David Washbrook, "Orients and Occidents: Colonial Discourse Theory and the Historiography of British Empire," in Robin Winks, ed., *Oxford History of the British Empire*, V (Oxford, 1999), 596–611.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Pels, "The Anthropology of Colonialism: Culture, History, and the Emergence of Western Governmentality," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), 163–83. Cf. Peter Pels, "The Construction of Ethnographic Occasions in Late Colonial Uruguru," *History and Anthropol-*

ordinary procedures, such as religious conversion, or the “*bricolage* of tactical engagements” that take place in expeditions and military conquest.<sup>12</sup> The current challenge for historians of colonialism is how to approach the heterogeneous, contradictory, and bodily character of colonialism in practice along with its dynamics of weakness and vulnerability.

This essay engages that challenge through an analysis of the Portuguese occupation of an inland province of Angola called Moxico from 1894 to 1905, a period generally regarded in the historiography of colonial expansion as the heyday of imperialist territorial and military expansion in Africa.<sup>13</sup> Moxico is an apt location for the investigation of imperial (in)vulnerability. Colonial vulnerability assumes a variety of faces in Moxico. It can be regarded as a geographically peripheral place, historically neglected among colonial occupation efforts; a site of emotional and corporeal experiential dramas of colonizer’s vulnerability; a place of emerging contradictions and tensions within projects and communities of colonizers; and, finally, as a pervasive trope of terror and darkness in colonial imaginings. The argument of this article is thus derived from the exploration of these diverse faces of vulnerability as experienced in material practice and interpreted in discourse, giving prominence to the way vulnerability was incarnated in colonizers’ experiences. It argues that the study of imperial vulnerability can concentrate on the analysis of colonial collectives and counter-vulnerability activities, that is, colonizers’ tactical *arts de faire* engaged in the protection of colonial campaigns and the reduction of their vulnerabilities.<sup>14</sup> This analysis critiques colonial narratives of vulnerability as events of heroism, and thus will describe the diverse ways of narrating colonial vulnerabilities. I will divide my excursion through these topics in four sections. I will first attempt to make clear the notion of vulnerability as emergent in the colonizers’ own experiences. The following sections are concerned with a critical description of the horror and heroic narratives that made up colonial literary and political imagery of Moxico and its imperial occupation during the first decades of the 20th century. Here I try to demonstrate how imperial imaginations either conceived empire in Moxico as a fractured and internally disruptive enterprise or turned colonial vulnerabilities into elements of an elastic and powerful “blood and tears” rhetoric of sacrifice, heroism, and victory. In the last section I will try to offer an alternative account of vulnerability events by paying particular attention to the occupation of Moxico in 1894. I will use the notion

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*ogy*, 8, 1–4 (1994), 321–51, esp. 321–22; Ricardo Roque, *Antropologia e Império: Fonseca Cardoso e a expedição à Índia em 1895* (Lisbon, 2001), esp. 126–37 and 182–207.

<sup>12</sup> Pels, “Anthropology of Colonialism,” 170–71.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Valentim Alexandre, “Situações coloniais: II—O ponto de viragem: as campanhas de ocupação (1890–1930),” in AAVV, *História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Lisbon, 1998), IV, 182–211; H. L. Wesseling, *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880–1914* (Westport, Conn., 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Michel de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien. I—Arts de faire* (Paris, 1990), 59–63.

of colonial collectives and put forward some potential theoretical tools for analyzing vulnerable colonialisms in practice.

### Bodily Experiences of Vulnerability

I begin the discussion of colonialism's incompleteness in Moxico by returning to Captain Cardoso's journey. Fonseca Cardoso kept a daily account of his travels in a small notebook.<sup>15</sup> There we can find a detailed description of the itinerary, of the events, people, and situations that most impressed him, as well as of all the materials and other actors with whom he had to interact during his two months of travel in Angola, from December 11, 1904 to February 16, 1905. After a hard day's walk, hampered by a leg injury, Cardoso camped at the margins of the river Liabôa [sic]. There, he and his fellow traveller António Jacinto d'Almeida (or Capata), met up with an old friend, Panada Leitão. They spent the moonlit evening together having a friendly chat. Capata, a veteran in Africa, told several stories of colonial life. Impressed, Cardoso wrote a detailed account of Capata's story in his diary. It was about violence, hunger, despair, crying, and fear experienced by Portuguese Sergeant Lima and Captain Tchiteúla. In 1899 they crossed the Portuguese border with the Belgian Congo and experienced fearful and anxious moments when they were attacked by Africans and persecuted by Belgian troops. This historical episode contradicts Pélissier's view that the Portuguese did not venture into the Eastern regions or beyond formal borders.<sup>16</sup> But mostly it epitomizes the emotional stress of colonizers living on the Angolan border, and makes clear the strong sense of vulnerability that was prevalent in this African colonial situation:

Tchiteúla and Sergeant Lima went to Lulua [region in the independent Congo State] to solve an *indaca* [dispute]<sup>17</sup> with the Lundas of Lulua, and expected to receive twenty loads of rubber, twenty oxen, and twenty ivory pieces. The sergeant and twenty-two soldiers penetrated into Belgian territory through the Cassai and went beyond the Lulua. When they arrived at their destination, Sergeant Lima did not accept the demands of the Quiocos

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<sup>15</sup> This unpublished manuscript notebook is part of Artur da Fonseca Cardoso descendants' family holdings. I am grateful to Maria Amália, Maria Helena, and Miguel da Fonseca Cardoso for their permission to comment on and publish this material. Eglantina Monteiro (University of Porto) also gave important help in locating and accessing some of those materials. On Cardoso's presence in Moxico, see also Artur da Fonseca Cardoso, "Em terras do Moxico: Apontamentos de etnografia angolense," *Trabalhos da Sociedade Portuguesa de Antropologia e Etnologia* 1, 1 (1919), 11–35; Marie-Louise Bastin, "Fonseca Cardoso: Exploration de la région de Moxico (Angola) en 1904," *Trabalhos de Antropologia e Arqueologia*, 30 (1990), 45–49.

<sup>16</sup> Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, I, 372.

<sup>17</sup> *Indacas* (also called *mucanos*; or *ouvidas*, in northern Angola) were judicial or criminal indigenous disputes (*questões gentílicas*), locally decided by local colonial authorities "in accordance" with African indigenous customs as they understood them.

people, who were willing to attack and rob the Lundas.<sup>18</sup> As a consequence he and his men were besieged. Soon he was in danger of dying from shortage of food, and believed his days were ending. Two big native caravans then came to him, one of which was commanded by trader Lima. After incorporating these caravans into his force, Lima was able to escape back through the Cassai. At that moment, a Belgian force was already persecuting the Portuguese force. The Portuguese were forced to sell one thousand and five hundred cartridges to the natives as a means to avoid dying of hunger. Sergeant Lima undertook this extraordinary trek on April 6, [18]99 and reached Moxico on August 25! In the course of this adventure, Captain Tchiteúla suffered from insomnia and sometimes desperately broke down into tears. One should not be surprised though, for he had such heavy responsibilities! Well, then, he pulled through all this without a scratch.<sup>19</sup>

Like Lima and Tchiteúla, Cardoso was a frontier officer who had experienced the physical suffering they described. He ends the narrative by confessing his feeling of relief at the happy ending of Capata's story. This expression of relief is particularly revealing of this story of colonial vulnerability in which even the leading military officer broke down in tears. It talks about danger and conflict without depicting any images of hegemony, victory, or imperial success. In fact, this type of anecdote might have been left uncovered both by imperial and historiographic large-scale narratives. Portuguese imperialist histories from the 1930s centered Moxico's history on the epic and successful "occupation" led by Captain Trigo Teixeira in 1894, and Moxico's case itself has been left largely understudied by historians, who occasionally point out its irrelevant and marginal position in the imperial occupation.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, experiences of vulnerability interfere with the heroic tone of both colonial and anticolonial rhetorics of imperial supremacy and may therefore have been omitted, whether consciously or unconsciously. Both those in support of the empire and those who attack it need colonial invulnerability as a matter of fact to construct their own truth and authority.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the shadow of dominant

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<sup>18</sup> *Quiocos* was the colonial category used to designate the Tchokwe people, who predominantly inhabited the Lunda region in northeast Angola. Similarly, *Lundas* designated the Lunda ethnic group who inhabited Eastern Angola and the Congo region. Conflicts between Lunda and Tchokwe arose in the late 19th century due to the latter's attempts to expand their power into Lunda territories.

<sup>19</sup> Artur da Fonseca Cardoso, *Travel Notebook, Angola*, December 20, 1904, Fonseca Cardoso's Descendants' Holdings [hereafter FCD].

<sup>20</sup> Pélissier, *História das campanhas*; "Situações coloniais: II," 194; Alexandre, *O império africano*; Freundeunthal, "Angola."

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner, eds., *Culture, Power and History: A Reader in Contemporary History* (Princeton, 1994), 336–71.



narratives of empire and resistance, this very same tale of vulnerability was important for colonial actors on the spot. For Fonseca Cardoso, Capata, and Panada Leitão colonialism was about vulnerability. Their experiences were not fictional or incomplete and their concept of empire was no less imperial because they were harmed. They talked about an empire in Moxico and Eastern Angola that was imperial simply due to its vulnerable, undecided, and distressed character. This empire was profoundly subordinated to others' actions and decisions, and was carried out more by force of circumstance than by the individual forces of isolated heroes. Here, empire was about avoiding being hurt or harmed, and it could be better described by tactical rather than by strategic performances.

These are the kinds of colonial vulnerabilities developed in this essay. We begin by exploring the possibility of telling a story of vulnerable empires and colonialisms, also of how these vulnerabilities can be confronted and eventually converted into colonial strength. To invert the methodological starting point of historical research from "superiority" to "vulnerability" may enable us to tell a different story of colonialism, one that neither heroicizes those vulnerabilities nor denounces them as evidence of a faulty, defective, or incomplete colonialism. I would thus rather consider fragility as constitutive of concrete colonial situations, a fragility visible either in colonial texts, incarnated emotions, or pervasive technological problems of power that had to be confronted in practice. If vulnerability is a mark of the collectives I intend to describe, its opposite is not invulnerability. Rather than turning stories of vulnerability into accounts of heroism and invulnerability, I sustain the hypothesis that one should keep vulnerability grounded in situated performances, and focus on the practices and effects of counter-vulnerability.

### **Angola's Heart of Darkness: Moxico and the Colonial Imagination**

In the context of Portugal's New State (1926–1974) authoritarian regime's strongly ideological assumption of the Portuguese imperial vocation, Portuguese writer Maria Archer drew one of the most vivid accounts of Africanist colonial imagings of Moxico. She visited the region in the 1930s and published a literary description of her travel under the title *Remarkable Aspects of a Distant Country* in Portugal's Colonial Papers series, which supported official propaganda about Portuguese imperial greatness. Archer's baroque description was meant to give Portuguese readers a real image of the distant empire. Her travelogue was certainly one of the first literary accounts of Moxico available to a wider public. The narrator invited the reader to follow her thrilling experiences in the Eastern Angolan border region. Those "remarkable aspects" were put together in a narrative that mythically imagined colonial Moxico as mysterious but terrible, inviolate but deeply frightening. In Moxico the empire was at the edge of being swallowed up, for it was reduced to "some hardly imposing forts, fragile landmarks of suzerainty where flags fly as

cautious guardians of land claims,” and “half a dozen civil posts ... like islands in an ocean of land.”<sup>22</sup> Travellers were imminently at death’s door. Only heroes, black savages, animals, and natural entities could eventually survive the dangers of this infernal land. “Silent Moxico, hermetic country,” Archer wrote, “devoted to wonders, to the bewitched curses of the One Thousand and One Nights! ... “Only those who travelled across the cursed dust of those jungles, of those bits of lonely savannah—can say what Africa is. The mysterious, barbarian, and terrifying Africa.”<sup>23</sup> She continued, naming Moxico the “African heart,” “isolation—in all its horror”:

That distant country, that jungle on top of the mountains, is the African heart, it is the hinterland that most deeply engulphed the exploration drive of the Portuguese in the terrible heart of Africa. Across the remote horizons of the lost “rose-colored map,” it draws boundaries with Rhodesia and Belgium Congo, jungles that prolong other jungles.<sup>24</sup>

Obscure, terrible, “Hell’s mouth,” Archer’s terrifying Moxico resonates with a more diffuse metropolitan cultural imagination of Africa as the “land of banishment.”<sup>25</sup> Indeed, most of late nineteenth-century Angolan settler population was composed of men and women convicted of ordinary crimes, political exiles, prostitutes, and orphans; many of them would eventually stay in Angola as businessmen or farmers after finishing their sentences.<sup>26</sup> By the 1890s, colonization policies for the distant East centered on moving this stigmatized population from the littoral to the inland territories. And it was along this flow of settlement that the Portuguese government decided to ground the effective occupation of Moxico. A Penal and Agricultural Colony was created there in 1894 in order to initiate white settlement and establish military and political occupation. The Penal Colony was abolished in 1901, however—because, in the words of Benguela’s governor in 1901, “it was not

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<sup>22</sup> Maria Archer, *Singularidades dum país distante* (Lisbon, 1936), 44.

<sup>23</sup> Archer, *Singularidades*, 41, 48.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. Archer significantly alludes to the “rose-colored map” episode of 1890, a traumatic event in Portuguese patriotic fervor and nationalist imagination. After several expeditions and diplomatic efforts to extend the Portuguese territorial area of influence from Angola to Mozambique through a contiguous inland connection, the Portuguese government was forced to capitulate by a British ultimatum in 1890. A rose-colored map linking Angola to Mozambique, the Atlantic coast to the Indian coast of Africa, represented Portugal’s territorial ambition in Africa, which British interests in central Africa strongly opposed. With this image Archer made the distant Moxico a painful remembrance of that lost project of imperial grandeur. See Charles E. Nowell, *The Rose-Colored Map: Portugal’s Attempt to Build an African Empire from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean* (Lisbon, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Freudenthal, “Angola,” 385. Cf. Alexandre, “A África no imaginário político português (séculos XIX–XX),” in AAVV, *Actas do Colóquio Construção e Ensino da História de África* (Lisbon, 1994), 231–244.

<sup>26</sup> Freudenthal, “Angola,” 385.

productive, and has neither corresponded to its political purpose, nor to the highly humanitarian intentions of its administrators." The flow of convicts to Moxico partly supported the colonial image of a banished land.<sup>27</sup> Truly, the reasons evoked by the governor of Benguela, Joaquim Teixeira Moutinho, to justify the administrative reform of the Benguela district (including Moxico) and the extinction of the colony in 1901 have much to reveal about how vulnerability narratives were variously performed and incorporated in the relationship that colonial authorities maintained with Moxico.

The authorities' dark vision of Moxico was associated with everyday problems of government and colonial order, which were enacted in a peculiar narrative of imperial vulnerability centered on the management of "white race" colonizers. The horrors of Moxico were part of the governor's efforts to order the empire. In 1901 he reclassified Moxico as an administrative and military district, thus shifting settlement policy towards a more administratively controlled and military aggressive form of occupation.<sup>28</sup> From the governor's point of view, inland Angola was ungovernable and the problem lay with its white community—the colonizers themselves. Their abuse of authority over the natives, their tendency to cheat local people in the rubber trade, and their illegal appropriations of colonial state taxes for personal benefit earned inland colonial officers and businessmen a reputation as untrustworthy and deceitful people.

Thus, worse than a no-man's-land, Moxico was a land of uncontrolled imperial disorders caused by evil and corrupt settlers. Since at least 1894 many of these settlers had gone to the interior in pursuit of the profitable trade in wild rubber. Wild rubber reached its commercial peak in the period 1888–1900, but declined in profitability from 1901.<sup>29</sup> As mediators between the seacoast ports and the inland native kingdoms, both state officers and merchants were seen as part of a common illicit business expropriating goods from the natives and taxes from the state. White settlers were people out of control, a particularly disordered colonial collectivity that caused governmental vulnerability in Angola's hinterland. "We are convinced," the governor wrote, "that the cause of our disgrace among the indigenous people is the merchant authority.... As a consequence of the commercial crisis in the district, Europeans, tramps, and banished people are abusing the local people; indebted,

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<sup>27</sup> Joaquim Teixeira Moutinho, "Projecto de reorganização administrativa de Benguela. Projecto e relatório do governador do Distrito de Benguela, Joaquim Teixeira Moutinho, 1901," Folio 21, 1900–1901, 2nd Section, 1st Division, Room 12, Angola, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon [hereafter AHU].

<sup>28</sup> This shift is a harbinger of the militarist colonial thought dominant in the metropolis from 1895 onwards, a line of thought that Eduardo Ferreira da Costa, governor-general of Angola in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, would strongly encourage. Eduardo Ferreira da Costa, *Occupação Militar—Dominio Effectivo das Nossas Colonias. Conferência realizada na Sociedade de Geographia em a noite de 27 de Novembro de 1901* (Lisbon, 1903).

<sup>29</sup> Freudenthal, "Angola," 330.

without resources, fired from the commercial establishments, they recently arrived in the interior and, there, they multiply the abuses, rekindling a sense of outrage among the indigenous people."<sup>30</sup> The governor classified the white community of colonizers in four main categories, "equivalent to many other classes of violence and abuses practiced by them":

To the first class belong those who ... make use of the most frivolous reason to exploit the indigenous.... To the second class belong those who call themselves judicial authorities and pretend to resolve indigenous disputes..... To the third class belong the traders who force the indigenous intermediary to buy textiles in advance. When the indigenous intermediary gets the textiles, he adds a sound percentage to the original price of the goods. Then he trades them in the hinterland markets, within and outside the district.... Throughout his long incursion, the black man—whether happy or unhappy, in possession of many or few goods—, never pays for the textiles. He often steals and therefore is taken to the local colonial authority, the *capitão-mór*. To the fourth class belong those settlers who establish themselves where caravans are obliged to pass through, with the intention of forcing the caravans to pay them a tax for crossing their lands.<sup>31</sup>

The above passage makes the governor's challenge clear: how to create faithful imperial delegates and detach Moxico colonial officers from their alliance with corrupt businessmen and their unscrupulous trade practices. Moreover, he faced the problem of how to organize a range of unruly actors to stave off native uprisings against colonial authority. The solution was to separate colonial state officers from their "black market" business practices and break their alliance with the merchants. He expected to accomplish this by replacing the old Moxico personnel with disciplined and competent soldiers and officials, and by raising their salary, "so that there will be no further complaints of inland officials supplying themselves independently, for their own profit when and how they please, ignoring the state appointed supplier."<sup>32</sup>

This administrative reform apparently did not discipline the disordered community of colonizers. Just one year later, in 1902, a violent and widespread rebellion led by Ovimbundo people exploded in central Angola, forcing the Lisbon government to retaliate with a potent metropolitan military expedition to reassert Portuguese dominance in the region. The revolt also inspired an important body of literature on the causes of the rebellion. The polemic set colonial authorities against inland businessmen, settlers, and the corrupt soldiers whose deceitful and violent trading practices they blamed for the uprising.<sup>33</sup> The war extended to the regions of

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<sup>30</sup> Moutinho, "Projecto de reorganização."

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Moutinho, "Projecto de reorganização."

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, II, 79–83.

Bié and Moxico. In September 1902 following some worrying news of the Quioco and Lutchaze people's "abnormal" unruliness, Captain Pedro Massano de Amorim was put in charge of the military. Massano de Amorim denounced the "pernicious influence and the criminal behavior" of inland "authorities and merchants [who] use all means to implement illicit processes, uniquely regarding the blind purpose of profit."<sup>34</sup> Amorim's hostility towards merchants and small authorities certainly earned him the hatred of the hinterland community, which vehemently denounced the document, blaming the colonial government for the revolt. Amorim was no less aggressive. He expelled from Moxico all Europeans whose identity papers were not in order and pressed judicial inquiries on all formally accused defendants, remanding them to court in Benguela. Massano de Amorim concluded, "The white horde of Moxico is the worst of all Benguela, as was further proved by the judicial cases and trials on the coast."<sup>35</sup>

An important implication arises if one considers Moxico either mythically as a terrifying, mysterious land of darkness, or more pragmatically as a disordered and ungovernable social order of colonial subjects. Both narratives depicted an imperial land that was frightening or problematic, preparing for the possibility of a story of defeating those difficulties. Archer's view of Moxico's darkness concentrated on aesthetic analogies between savage nature, Greek heroes, and Angolan Moxico, but administrative accounts saw it as a consequence of a villainous population of colonizers who had to be reformed. However, one can point out some important differences. The governor's narrative allows us to detect internal colonial heterogeneity. But it also allows us to watch a vulnerable empire in action, that is, an empire attacked from the inside, harmed by its own colonial servants and military officers, not by hordes of indigenous rebels. In contrast, Archer's travelogue reveals a reality that perfectly fitted an heroic, epic, and nationalist rhetoric that was central in public discourses on imperial expansion from the late nineteenth century to its official uses during the New State regime.<sup>36</sup> This rhetoric transformed vulnerabilities into symptoms of colonial strength and heroism.

### Tales of Heroism: Moxico and Epic Narratives

Portugal's nineteenth- and twentieth-century empire was depicted recurrently as an epic national accomplishment carried out by exceptional characters, the heroes of occupation. These heroic narratives implied a backdrop of colonial savagery and

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<sup>34</sup> Pedro Massano de Amorim, "Província de Angola. Coluna de operações ao norte de Benguela. Relatório do capitão Pedro Massano de Amorim, 1902," Folio 966, 1902, General, Military Section, Angola, AHU.

<sup>35</sup> Amorim, "Província de Angola."

<sup>36</sup> Roque, *Antropologia e Império*, 39–44; Sérgio Campos Matos, *História, Mitologia, Imaginário Nacional. A História no Curso dos Liceus (1895–1939)* (Lisbon, 1990). For a general view on the New State regime see Fernando Rosas, *O Estado Novo* (Lisbon, 1994).

crisis from which imperial order and its heroic achievements would eventually be wrought. In her travel account, Maria Archer complained about the nation's neglect of state civil servants and soldiers in Moxico. She saw *chefes de posto*, the lowest level local officials, as the nation's forgotten heroes, patriotic empire-builders, true Hercules. They were "hero[es] of African expansion. The heroism, the true and ignored heroism, of those white people isolated in the jungle, pioneers of civilization in the tropics, does not have material compensation, it is not worth consideration or prize."<sup>37</sup> Although the above problems of governing a disordered community of settlers in Moxico might not have been relevant for the 1930s colonial Angola administration, the fact is that Maria Archer saw imperial heroes where Governor Teixeira Moutinho and Captain Amorim saw troublesome settlers. For her, heroic agency really depicted empire-building along the border. It was thus part of her account of a terrifying and mythical heart of darkness. Danger, disorder, horror, and savagery were marks of an epic language of empire, supplying the appropriate material for performances of modern colonial heroic ethos.<sup>38</sup> As on a sacrificial altar, Moxico white settlers were taken to experience an inscrutable colonial fate: "Sacrifice! Sacrifice!," Maria Archer shouted, "But to what God? Why are they crushing in that way human lives, souls, and bodies?"<sup>39</sup>

In 1939, João de Almeida Junior might have answered this rhetorical question. Writing in the same series of *Cadernos Coloniais*, he stressed sacrifice for empire as part of a spiritual commitment to a national mission of heroic achievements, part of a "crusaders' spirit" that inherently formed the Portuguese vocation for expansion at the border. As evidence of Portuguese imperial strength in Moxico, that most remote and treacherous land, he edited the "unpublished" narrative of former Captain Frederico César Trigo Teixeira, while he was in command of the settlement expedition of Moxico Penal Colony in 1894. The account of that heroic journey was allegedly extracted from his field diary<sup>40</sup>: "Without his patriotism, will,

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<sup>37</sup> Archer, *Singularidades*, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mike Featherstone, "The Heroic Life and Everyday Life," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 9 (1992), 159–82.

<sup>39</sup> Archer, *Singularidades*, 44.

<sup>40</sup> The published diary of the campaign is a selective account set up by João de Almeida Júnior (who was also responsible for heading each section of the narrative with tabloid heroic titles). Indeed, the narrative is a partial extraction of the original manuscript diary held at Lisbon Geographical Society: Frederico César Trigo Teixeira, *Diário da Colônia Penal Militar Agrícola da Região do Bihé com princípio em 31 de Agosto de 1894*, Reserved Section, Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa. In the analysis that follows I will keep my focus on the published narrative in order to highlight the possibility of retelling the heroic truncated selection as a story of vulnerability by means of a vocabulary alternative to the epic tone of Almeida Júnior. Echoing an insight by Homi Bhabha (although not following his style of approach), I thus suggest that vulnerability experiences can even be discerned *in-between* colonial discourse itself. It should be noted though that certainly a full exploration of this conceptual frame would benefit from in-depth analysis of the manuscript, which was not possible within the scope of this article. Cf. Homi Bhabha,

and spirit of sacrifice," declared Almeida Junior, "we would not be today the lords of the vast region of Moxico..."<sup>41</sup> Teixeira's heroic tale had a lineage of military stories of "African heroes of occupation" going back at least to the character of Captain Mouzinho de Albuquerque and the war against Mozambican Gaza leader Gungunhana in 1895.<sup>42</sup> According to Almeida Junior, Teixeira's achievement was neglected by his contemporaries in 1894, and the captain himself had to retire early because of severe illnesses contracted during his inland adventure. Metropolitan politicians and public opinion only recognized to Teixeira's expedition as an imperial accomplishment in 1905.<sup>43</sup>

The reason was contextual. In 1905, under the diplomatic arbitration of the king of Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom finally resolved a long-term conflict over the eastern borders of Angola and western Northern Rhodesia, a controversy that went back to the "rose-colored map" episode of 1890.<sup>44</sup> According to Portuguese interpretation, Italian arbitration supported her claims. Crucial to that interpretation was Italian acceptance of Portugal's prior occupation of Eastern Angola, occupation based on Trigo Teixeira's expedition to Moxico in 1894. On that basis, Portugal held prior claim to Moxico, arguing that the English were latecomers. Portugal created a hero of Angolan exploration of the inland, and was eager to attribute the agency of the so-called "occupation of Moxico" to a single actor: Captain Trigo Teixeira.

The heroic rendering of Teixeira's diaries by Almeida Junior and an anonymous reader stressed the infinite obstacles, dangers, and enemies the captain had to confront and surmount during the travel and settlement efforts in Moxico between 1894 and 1895. Trigo Teixeira's statements, such as his assertion that "There were never-ending problems," were stressed as evidence that the occupation of Moxico should be celebrated as an imperial victory.<sup>45</sup> The expedition personnel

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"Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 102–122.

<sup>41</sup> João de Almeida Junior, "Prefácio," in Frederico César Trigo Teixeira, *A ocupação do Moxico* (Lisbon, 1939), s.p.

<sup>42</sup> António Enes, *A guerra d' África em 1895 – Memórias* (Lisbon, 1898).

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, *A ocupação do Moxico e a acção de Trigo Teixeira em Angola*, (Lisbon, 193--). This very same source transcribed several news items appearing in Portuguese metropolitan newspapers in 1905–1906 to celebrate Trigo Teixeira's action.

<sup>44</sup> In 1890 and 1891, the British and the Portuguese celebrated diplomatic treaties (Anglo-Portuguese Conventions) vaguely defining borders between Angola and Rhodesia. Actually, Eastern Angolan boundaries would still only be partially settled by 1913–1914 (Alexandre, "Situações coloniais"; Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, II, 117–118). This situation led Pélissier to conclude that, "during almost all the occupation period, the Portuguese of Moxico were not quite sure where to find the subjects they were to administer." Pélissier, *História das campanhas*, II, 118.

<sup>45</sup> Frederico César Trigo Teixeira, *A ocupação do Moxico* (Lisbon, 1939), 17.

were composed of criminals and banished white people constantly trying to escape from the column, and so imperial history states that Teixeira was heroically able to transform some of those deceitful people into patriotic soldiers and servants of empire. Teixeira also had to persevere against a natural environment that “obstructed his way, with trees that had to be cut down with hammers ... raging river torrents that were surmounted with difficulty.”<sup>46</sup> He further had to confront what he perceived to be the seditious influence of English and American Protestant missionaries who were undermining his diplomatic efforts with native African leaders by introducing “intrigues” and “lies.”<sup>47</sup> He had to erect a fort to house additional settlers and Portuguese representatives; and he finally had to forge alliances with the eventually hostile native leaders and guarantee their obedience to the Portuguese king—his abnegation was allegedly such that he offered his own sword and jacket to gain the support of a local leader.<sup>48</sup> In the end, rather than a story of vulnerability, we find here a tale of empire’s hegemony embodied in a single subject. A hero’s strength produced colonialism’s invulnerability.

### The Occupation of Moxico: Vulnerability Stories and Counter-vulnerability Practices

However, we can read Teixeira’s account from another perspective and describe it with a different vocabulary. We can ask how the expedition collective represented by Trigo Teixeira could deal in practice with an inherent colonial vulnerability, without ever really being capable of turning that condition into uncontested invulnerability. Trigo Teixeira’s journey may be framed in epic narrative but it reveals episodes of vulnerability. The story of these episodes is left as an open process, along with the number and quality of actors involved. A somewhat different vulnerability story emerges from tactical activities of colonial collectives. The theoretical notion of collective is adapted from Law and Callon’s hybrid *collectifs*, an alternative sociological description of agency as an association of heterogeneous and distributed performances of human agents and other entities, such as material technologies or natural phenomena.<sup>49</sup> Collectives are precarious, and not necessarily strategically arranged. Their stability, durability, and length evolve as the relational composition of elements changes, practices are performed, and circumstances modified. They are therefore vulnerable, and their strength is not a predetermined outcome but an effect of emergent practices. It follows that colonial collectives’ momentous endurance, relative

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<sup>46</sup> Anon., *A ocupação do Moxico*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Teixeira, *A ocupação do Moxico*, 22.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Callon and John Law, “Agency and the Hybrid *Collectif*,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 94, 2 (1995), 481–507. Compare with Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope. Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).



unity, and stability are likely to be one among other possible effects (for example, the disruption of the collective) of the various attempts to deal with the unstable and vulnerable condition of collectives. Experiences of vulnerability called for activities of counter-vulnerability, those which could at least partially resolve potential disruptions of the collective and protect them from internal and external attacks. By counter-vulnerability I mean the sort of “modes of practicing” and “schemes of action” that are done in order to reduce, eliminate, or oppose vulnerable situations in colonial collectives. The colonial occupation of Moxico can thus be understood as a more or less ephemeral combination of chains of tactical procedures of counter-vulnerability, rather than as a strategic calculation of power. Following Michel de Certeau, such tactics are the astute arts of managing “occasions”; the cleverness of “generating strength out of [heterogeneous] elements that are originally strange,” having as a condition of possibility not the capitalization (or expansion) of its gains but simply the “seizing of an` opportunity.”<sup>50</sup> In this situation, these “modes of practicing” were a succession of precarious attempts to keep the expedition collective together by means of linking it to friendly indigenous kingdoms, for example, or protecting it from environmental attacks and the perceived intrigues of the missionaries. Therefore, the efforts to face the technological problem of vulnerability would not result in hegemony over the situations or agents (such as the inclement natural environment, the diseases, the escape of carriers, or the menace of indigenous attacks) that confronted colonial collectives. Rather, counter-vulnerability practices were able to provide the collectives with precarious immunity and unsteady cohesive arrangements. Complete invulnerability or hegemony were not, however, to be attained.

From this perspective, Trigo Teixeira was trying to manage a colonial hybrid formation that was largely out of his control and constantly under attack by both internal and external agents, either natural (as the trees, the rivers, or the diseases) or human (the tribal leaders, the missionaries, the settlers themselves). According to the

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<sup>50</sup> Michel de Certeau opposes the notion of tactics to the one of strategy. Paradoxically my notion of colonialism as tactics is adapted from Michel de Certeau’s work on the ephemeral, reptitious, everyday arts of practicing (*arts de faire*) developed by the “dominated” people in their struggle against hegemonic structures. De Certeau describes these practices as “operations almost microbial that proliferate within technocratic structures and modify their workings through a multiplicity of ‘tactics’ that are articulated on everyday ‘details.’” Certeau was criticizing Foucault’s view of modernity as a panoptic and disciplinary “microphysics” of power in which ordinary people were largely scrutinized, examined, disciplined. Instead, he appealed to the “antidiscipline” of the mundane practices (of reading, of walking ...), and had as referential the way colonized people were able to resist and subvert colonization (cf. Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, 59–63). In this paper, I am taking Certeau’s own analysis further into the colonizers’ practice itself—as if antidiscipline tactical practices were acting from within colonial power alongside the performances of colonial representatives themselves. By considering every configuration of power as vulnerable, and not necessarily strategic, I suggest that the modes of practicing (the “arts of transforming events into occasions” described by Certeau) can be turned into an analytic tool for the study of colonialism in practice.

captain and governor, the expedition of occupation included banished people transformed into soldiers (around seventy-two), many more carriers (around one thousand!), and a further collection of mules, ox carts, food supplies, textiles (as gifts to the natives), and some guns. But during the journey his collective chronically fell apart. The soldiers either died or ran away; native carriers frequently disappeared into the jungle, sometimes under the influence of indigenous leaders. All defectors pilfered the expedition supplies. Oxen died of disease. Thus, the task of “occupying” Moxico was equivalent to the hard work of keeping together a chaotic collective of people, animals, and things against the intervention of natural phenomena and human agents. While moving across Africa, this collective had to engage in a pragmatic ecological politics, an attempt to act upon objects, people and natural elements as a means to carry out the project of colonial occupation successfully. Different tactics were tried throughout this process. Punishment of those presumed responsible for the carriers’ escapes, for example, was one change—although it was not always successful. Teixeira tells that, one evening, “sixteen ganguela and eleven Chingue carriers escaped, despite the fact that we had handcuffed and arrested three of their leaders, whom we held responsible for earlier escapes.”<sup>51</sup> Also, the construction of a fortress by the time the expedition reached Moxico physically protected the collective by transforming its material setting. It illustrates how the consolidation of colonial occupation depended on effective and stable material forms that could resist environmental and indigenous attacks—in this case, forms that could protect the colonial collective from the harmful action of the African enemies.

These ecological arrangements cannot be simply described by what Trigo Teixeira mentions as “native policy” (*política indígena*), the art of forging diplomatic alliances with local leaders. Teixeira worked hard to link the Portuguese empire to the local leaders, for these arrangements with “human communities” were fundamental in settlement. The collectives’ political practice cannot be reduced to alliances with local authorities but rather must be seen as a pragmatic effort both to link newly arrived settlers with native collectives and to oppose the harmful effects of the natural environment upon the integrity of the collective and the explorers’ bodies. However, the development of both “native policy” and spatial politics were always unfinished. The expedition remained incomplete; some soldiers and carriers were faithful, while others escaped; some native leaders accepted the Captain’s gifts, while others did not. Although the Ferreira de Almeida fortress was built in Moxico in 1895, making a more comfortable spatial ecology for the indigenous alliances’ policy, the fact remained that outside the fort, the collectives had to confront their vulnerability. Life beyond the fortress clearly remained precarious. The Moxico fortress did not solve the problem of colonial vulnerability. In Teixeira’s view English-speaking missionaries continued to undermine Portuguese alliances with

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<sup>51</sup> Teixeira, *A ocupação do Moxico*, 18.

African leaders. New vulnerability problems had to be managed, new collectives and counter-vulnerability tactics had to emerge.

The occupation efforts later led by Capitão-mór Fonseca Cardoso revealed the prevalence of threats. Although a full discussion of these later attempts to cope with colonial weakness is beyond the scope of this essay a brief mention will help us to see how fortresses were the ultimate yet vulnerable refuge of occupation collectives. Forts provided the safest ecology for colonizers, a material form of life at the core of imperial action inland. The identity of Cardoso and the Portuguese empire was apparently intimately intertwined with the materiality of the fortress: the Portuguese presence in Moxico was referred to by some local people in Moxico as, in Cardoso's words, "*govúlo* [the government of the fortress]." <sup>52</sup> The connection, of course, may also have suggested the narrow bounds of Portuguese authority in the region. The events of 1903–1904, as reported by Cardoso, reveal the importance of the fortress. Isolated in his fort, Captain Cardoso had to manage a military response to a dangerous uprising of Lutchaze people. In his report to the Angola governor, Cardoso wrote: "I was warned that I would be attacked [by the Lutchaze warriors] in my own fortress. I didn't give any importance to the fact, for I thought it too daring; yet I decided to keep guard over the fort. The next day, however, some European traders settled on the perimeter of the fortress came to me in a hurry to warn me that rebellious natives were gathering their forces at the Cuango, in order to strike me by night. I took my precautions...." <sup>53</sup> Besieged colonial collectives had to face their vulnerability. Indeed, it was only due to their great efforts and a fortunate chain of circumstances that Cardoso and his men survived the Lutchaze war. The Africans did not attack the fortress. Cardoso forged a series of alliances with European traders and several other indigenous armies and set out on a counter-attack campaign that undercut a Lutchaze attack and successfully secured the Portuguese fortress in Moxico.

Those appointed to serve the empire in Moxico looked forward to the moment when they could leave the land of banishment and danger. Captain Fonseca Cardoso probably left Ferreira de Almeida fortress with a great sense of relief. Certainly he knew the journey back to the coast would be difficult, although he took precautions by properly outfitting the group for the trip. However, like Teixeira, during the journey Cardoso had to confront the chronic indiscipline of the carriers, the hostility of the environment, fevers, the menace of indigenous attacks, and inadequate maps. After two months travel, their arrival at the coastal village of Lobito on 15 February 1905 was a happy moment. The bodily sufferings and dangers of the journey were now close to an end. The Lutchaze, the war, jungle fevers, and danger-

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<sup>52</sup> Artur da Fonseca Cardoso, "Relatório das operações nos Lutchazes na região do Canasse, 1904, por Artur Fonseca Cardoso, capitão-mór do Moxico," Folio 968, 1903–1904, General, Military Division, Angola, AHU.

<sup>53</sup> Cardoso, "Relatório das operações nos Lutchazes na região do Canasse, 1904.

ous rivers were left behind inland. The comfort of the peaceful and familiar landscape, friendships, mixed society, and the sea enhanced the pleasure of Cardoso's arrival. He expressed his sense of having attained safe haven:

We got under way to Lobito, through the Planalto. All of a sudden one came in sight of the ocean. What a joy, what a satisfaction! Two years have gone without sighting the ocean, that good ocean that lulled me since my childhood! It was 1 p.m. when we went down to the sandy spit that borders the bay, forming an excellent natural port. Three kilometers before, Chiquito, a scout at the service of Boy's brother, awaited me with a letter, two boxes of champagne, beer, and port wine, an invitation for me to stay at his house, and those drinks to refresh me. And it was really providential, for we had been walking thirsty and under the heat.... In the evening after we had dinner with the ladies, a fact that much embarrassed us for we looked like savages and had no proper clothing, we were informed that Ignacio was coming to pick us up. Finally by 11 p.m. my friend hugged me and we enjoyed a night of lively conversation until 2 a.m.!<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to approach the study of colonialism in practice by replacing notions of superiority and hegemony with those of vulnerability and colonial collectives. Colonialism's inherent vulnerability should be assumed, paving the way for the incompleteness and bodily contingencies of colonial situations. In order to develop a perspective on colonial collectives' material and narrative performances, I have analyzed colonial tales of heroism and horror in Moxico, Angola. Could these tales be told differently? How did colonial vulnerability and practices of counter-vulnerability interfere with the imperialist's turn from colonial problems of power to heroic tales of conquest?

In focusing on the occupation of Moxico led by Trigo Teixeira's expedition, I argue for an alternative understanding. Analyzing colonialism in practice, in contexts of spatial and territorial occupation, raises the issue of how vulnerable colonial collectives were able to perform counter-vulnerability practices. In place of victorious conquerors I find evidence of emotionally and physically vulnerable subjects who were part and parcel of unstable collectives. In this context vulnerability had to be creatively and chronically counterbalanced: indigenous allies had to be recruited, carriers had to be controlled and punished, forts and bridges had to be erected, supplies had to be provided, diseases had to be healed. In practice problems of imperial vulnerability emerged and had to be addressed at each step of the occupation. A complex choreography of interactions involving colonial collectives, indigenous agents, and natural elements in the environment emerged. These were

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<sup>54</sup> Cardoso, *Travel Notebook, Angola*, February 15, 1905, FCD.

precariously and temporarily resolved by tactical moves of counter-vulnerability to protect the expedition and diminish the harmful effects of the environment, indigenous tribes, problematic carriers, diseases, and foreign missionaries.

Although this essay focuses on the dynamics of vulnerability and counter-vulnerability in the Portuguese experience in Moxico, the characteristic vulnerabilities of colonial collectives were certainly not unique to Portuguese colonialism, or in any way reflective of some allegedly weaker, ineffective form of colonialism. Rather, I think that this analysis of vulnerability and counter-vulnerability as performed in imperial attempts to appropriate space, resources, and people can be extended to other colonizers and colonized worlds.

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