Migrants, Settlers and Colonists: The Biopolitics of Displaced Bodies

Cristiana Bastos*

ABSTRACT

All through the nineteenth century, Madeirans migrated from their Atlantic island to places as remote as Hawaii, California, Guyana and, later, South Africa. Scarcity of land, a rigid social structure, periodic famines and rampant poverty made many embark to uncertain destinies and endure the harsh labour conditions of sugarcane plantations. In the 1880s, a few hundred Madeirans engaged in a different venture: an experience of “engineered migration” sponsored by the Portuguese government to colonize the southern Angola plateau. White settlements, together with military control, scientific surveys and expeditions, contributed to strengthen the claims of European nations over specific territories in Africa. At that time, the long lasting claims of Portugal over African territories were not matched by sponsored colonial settlements or precise geographic knowledge about the claimed lands. There was little else representing Portugal than the leftover structures of the slave trade, the penal colonies and the free-lance merchants that ventured inland. In fear of losing land to the neighbouring German, Boer and British groups in south-western Africa, the Portuguese government tried then to promote white settlements by attracting farmers from the mainland into the southern plateau of Angola. As very few responded to the call, the settlement consisted mostly of Madeiran islanders, who were eager to migrate anywhere and took the adventure of Angola as just another destiny out of the island where they could not make a living. Their bodies and actions in the new place became highly surveilled by the medical delegates in charge of assessing their adaptation. The reports document what were then the idealized biopolitics of migration and colonization, interweaving biomedical knowledge and political power over displaced bodies and colonized land. At the same time, those

* Social Sciences Institute, University of Lisbon.
records document the frustrations of the administration about the difficulties of the settlement experience and the ways in which colonial delegates blamed their failure on the very subjects who enacted and suffered through it. The eugenicism and racialism that pervade those writings, a currency during the age of empire, may now be out of taste both in science and in politics; however, they are not fully out of sight, and the subtle entrance of social prejudice into the hard concepts of biomedical science is still with us. Learning from this example may help analysing contemporary processes of medicalizing diversity or pathologizing the mobile populations, or, in other words, the biopolitics of migration in the 21st century.

MEDICINE, EMPIRE AND BIOPOLITICS

The ethnographic study of colonial archives has gathered anthropologists and historians in a vibrant field where, at least for the last two decades, both disciplines expanded their scopes and converged in methods, preoccupations and formulations. Restricting the discussion to the issues of medicine, health, and bodies, we can account for a number of works that provided a multilayered understanding of the relationship between political power, medical knowledge and the actual human experience in the context of colonialism.

The volumes on medicine and empire edited by Arnold (1988) and by Macleod and Lewis (1988), and the monographs on African, Asian and Pacific settings that followed them analysed the ways in which medicine in the colonies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century functioned as a tool of empire (Headrick, 1981). These works examined how the surveillance of epidemics and sanitary campaigns epitomized the control of the colonial state power over the bodies and lives of the colonized peoples (e.g., Lyons, 1992; Arnold, 1993; Manderson, 1996). Further developments included the study of colonial psychiatry (Vaughan, 1991; Ernst, 1991), eventually arguing that the categorization of the colonized peoples by the colonial authorities changed the terms in which Foucault formulated surveillance, punishment and control of individuals (Vaughan, 1991). Also addressing Foucault explicitly, the works of Anne Stoler on Dutch colonialism in the East Indies expanded the discussion of biopower into colonial settings (Stoler, 1995, 2004). Other works bridged the approach to colonialism and health and current approaches to health and migration (e.g., Marks and Worboys, 1997; Beneduce, 1998). The field keeps alive and expanding into new sorts of approaches, including the
relationship between the perception of the settlers health and the wellness services back home, as Jennings shows for the French spa treatments during colonization (Jennings, 2006).

Inspired by that literature, I will address the biopolitics of empire in the peculiar setting of Angola in the late nineteenth century, examining how state politics and settlement policies use and affect medical and biological knowledge. In the context of a mounting tension between European nations’ entitlement regarding African territories, the Portuguese government called for the colonization of southern Angola by experienced European farmers. The campaign was not entirely successful albeit highly scrutinised by the state. Doctors and colonial officers were the executioners of the surveillance. Their records, memos, reports, and comments, their references to an overarching project of political control over life and bodies, and their use of on-going medical theories regarding the acclimatisation of Europeans to the tropics can be regarded as an archive of the colonial biopolitics at that moment and place.

In that sense, those documents provide the basis for discussions on medical theories, colonialism and displaced bodies in general. Also, they bring out some elements that are not part of the standard tale of imperial rule: a colonial power in constant tension with other colonial powers to the point of discussing more about them than about the colonial subjects; and, also, a colonial power that exposed its weaknesses and
vulnerabilities more than its strengths, to the point of suggesting further analyses about the actual workings of empire.

MADEIRANS IN HUÍLA

In 1884, and for the following seven to eight years, hundreds of Madeiran islanders were boated by the Portuguese government to the coast of southern Angola and then tracked up the mountains until the Huíla plateau, where they were supposed to survive by creating new agricultural communities. They found endless difficulties all the way through the sailing, at the coast, on their way up the mountains, and finally at their destination. None of the settings was familiar or similar to what they had known. They had to break the sharp cliffs of Serra da Chela, which stands almost 2,000 meters above sea level. They had to endure a climate that was harsher and colder than that of their native island. They had to endure the prejudice that Portuguese authorities held over them. They had to interact, fight or mingle with the existing groups of Africans and Boer farmers who had settled there a few years before them.

In spite of the difficulties, the displaced Madeirans survived and their descendents lived through the twentieth century (Nascimento, 1891, 1892, 1912; Dias, 1923, 1926, 1928, 1940; Felner, 1940; Machado, 1918; Correia, 1925, 1930, 1934; Silva, 1971–73; Medeiros, 1976; Arrimar, 1997; Jasmins, 2000). People of Madeiran ancestry can still be found at the plateau today. There are no reported social studies focusing on Madeiran descendents in contemporary Huíla, but they appear in other sorts of literary sources (Agualusa, 2004; Carvalho, 1999; Mendes, 1999).

Long after their migration, Madeiran settlers of Huíla were to be remembered as pioneers and heroes. But that only happened when their tale became convenient to feed Portuguese claims of an old control over the area. At arrival, and at their early years in the Angolan plateau, Madeirans were not seen as heroes at all: they were highly despised by the colonial delegates in charge of assessing the settlement’s success (e.g., Almeida, 1885; Botelho, 1895, 1896). If anything went wrong, Madeirans were to be blamed. Drunk, lazy, unfit, ignorant, stupid and backwards were among the adjectives used to describe the new settlers in the Huíla plateau at the end of the nineteenth century. As islanders escaping extreme poverty, Madeirans carried the nineteenth century stigmas of the poor and the wretched, deemed to social failure, malfunction and dissolution – a good culprit to blame if the Huíla experience collapsed.
But there was something else at play. The amount of commentary about the inaptness of the settlers suggests that there was a high level of anxiety and that the whole thing might be deemed to fail. Previous experiences of white settlements in Southern Angola had already failed. Instead of turning into stable and prosperous farming communities, they had either succumbed or blended in.

The reports assessing the failures give the impression that Africa devoured Europeans not only by its fatal fevers but also by swallowing and transforming them, by Africanizing them, or, in the derogatory terms of the moment, by “caffrealizing” them. According to other European observers at the time, the Portuguese were particularly prone to that sort of degeneration. When venturing to the tropics, they would “caffrealize,” that is, mix, blend and adopt the ways of the natives, or “mongrelize”, that is, degenerate physically, mentally and racially. Decades later such stigma turned into pride through Gilberto Freyre’s lusotropical theories (Freyre, 1953), which converted the weaknesses of hybridizing and mixing into the strengths of hybridizing and mixing. But back in the late nineteenth century those stigmas shaped and gave content to the fears and anxieties of those involved in the assessment of the colonizing experiences.

In sum, the overall portrait that comes out of the health records is one of fragilities, vulnerabilities, anxieties and weaknesses. It hardly matches the standard imperial narrative about bringing civilisation to the uncivilized via the ways of military bravery and cultural enlightenment. It is also an attempt to think and theorize about the condition of displaced bodies, with a particular focus on the displaced European body in the tropics. Those reports engaged in the on-going discussions about the flexibility and adaptability of the human body. Theories of acclimatisation claimed that the human body, like those of plants and animals, could adapt to life in the tropics. There might even be such a thing as intermediary stations for the purpose of acclimatisation, like the highlands with their milder climate. Indeed, other European colonial empires had developed “hill stations” for the purpose (Kennedy, 1996; Jennings, 2006).

Those debates lay behind the commentaries on the physical fitness and the adaptation of Madeirans to the southern Angola lands. They were also interwoven with the racialist ideologies that reached their peak in the first half of the twentieth century. But, at the time, the concepts of flexibility and adaptation, as discussed by Harrison (1999) for India, were still pervasive in medical commentaries regarding displaced bodies.
NEW EUROPEAN TRENDS IN COLONIZATION AND SETTLEMENTS

What was new about promoting white settlements, or engineered migration, in colonial Africa? For centuries, the relationship between Europeans and Africans had revolved around the slave trade, which forced millions of Africans into New World plantations. The Portuguese had been prominent in the South Atlantic traffic lines which mostly fed Brazil. But things had changed in the nineteenth century: Brazil became an independent nation in 1822; the slave trade was increasingly prosecuted by international partners; and abolitionist currents had grown in importance and influence (Sá da Bandeira, 1873). In 1878, slavery was finally abolished within Portuguese territories, even though other forms of forced labour continued into the twentieth century affecting the indígenas, who did not share the rights of citizenship of either Europeans or assimilado Africans. In the meantime, other European nations promoted initiatives that fulfilled their interests in administering Africa. The overlapping of different European nations’ claims to African territory and the impossibility of fulfilling their different colonizing projects led to the mounting tensions that peaked in the years 1884–5. In those years, the famous Berlin Conference defined “who” among European nations was entitled to “what” in matters of African land. In the ultimate Eurocentric approach to Africa, European delegates engaged in drawing border lines across the map while pushing for their own interests. Some of those lines persist today as borders between African nations marked by the histories of competing European colonialisms.

The Portuguese administration had to adjust to the new trends or be left out of Africa. Other European nations no longer accepted old-style claims over land based on military conquest and symbolic presence via flags or stakes. Needless to say, at that point the views and opinions of Africans regarding their own land and lives were not even considered by those in charge. For Europeans involved in the “scramble” for Africa, its inhabitants were a mere nuisance, a part of the landscape, and, at best, a labour resource.

The new style of colonialism demanded a better knowledge of land and required its permanent occupation by the rulers. Other nations were acting to fulfill those requirements. Portugal tried to match the first of them by promoting the exploratory coast-to-coast trips of Serpa Pinto, Hermenegildo Capelo and Roberto Ivens. As for the requirement of...
permanent settlement, the Huila Plateau became the target. It was one of the few organized Portuguese attempts to settle in the tropics in the nineteenth century, to be celebrated later as a successful one.

However, things were not so well planned from the beginning. Much of what happened was due to chance rather than strategy – including the “choice” of Madeiran islanders, who were ready to go anywhere just to leave their home and escape the unbearable poverty and land-scarcity that loomed over them more than their mainland counterparts. In other words, what was meant to be an exemplary act of colonization in the perspective of political leaders was yet another choice of labour migration for those who were actually displaced. Escaping poverty, their bodies and skills were not ideal for the development of a pioneer settler community. Colonial officers repeatedly mentioned that point. And yet the colony survived and strived.

EARLIER EXPERIENCES IN SOUTHERN ANGOLA: PLACE AND PEOPLE

There had been previous attempts to move Europeans into the south of Angola. After Brazil’s independence from Portugal, in 1822, there were initiatives about resettling some discontent Portuguese from Brazil to Africa (Alexandre, 1999; Jasmins, 2000). Even though most Europeans regarded African lands as deadly, unhealthy and worthless places, every now and then politicians came up with the idea of building there a sort of “new Brazil” (Alexandre, 2000).

In 1839, a ship was sent from Luanda, Angola, to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in order to bring Portuguese residents into Angola (Silva, 1971: 343). However, many among those who embarked were precisely the ones who had failed in the Americas, and were hardly the ideal settlers for a new project. Africa needed farmers, and those who came on board were described as merchants, bakers, “artists” of different sorts, and hooligans (vadios). Only farmers, some authors argued, could create stable communities. Farmers were the ideal subjects for the exercise of colonial biopolitics: under the sponsorship of the state, farmers could reproduce life, expand the universe of the cultivated against the wild, of culture against nature, of the body of the nation against its enemies and rivals.

In 1849, another attempt to resettle Portuguese people from independent Brazil to Southern Angola was led by Bernardino Abreu e Castro. Two
vessels left Recife with a contingent of people escaping the anti-Portuguese conflicts known as *Revolução Praieira* (Pelissier, 1998; Vicente, 1969). Bernardino Abreu had already crossed the ocean towards Brazil, running from the Portuguese civil wars between “Miguelistas” and “Liberals.” Himself a defeated “Miguelista,” Bernardino Abreu tried to find a better environment for his ambitions in Brazil, but he did not succeed there either. In Africa, according to one biographer, Bernardino Abreu envisaged implementing a plantation system akin to that of Pernambuco (Vicente, 1969). There, again, he failed. Neither the land nor the people replicated the conditions of the Brazilian northeast. Slavery was in its last days, and free labour did not abound in southern Angola.

Further Portuguese attempts to create white colonies in the area failed for a few decades more. Sometimes, commentators blamed it on the site, but more often they blamed it on the people used for the settlements (e.g. Almeida, discussed by Silva, 1972b). The laudatory and pro-colonial books of Gastão de Sousa Dias (1923, 1926, 1928) were among those who blamed the failures on the improper preparation of the site. The more detailed analysis of Raul Silva argued that the problem was the inadequacy of the early settlers (Silva, 1973: 340). In his views, they were people looking for easy lives, unsympathetic to the endurance of agricultural labour and the development of sustained communities; they were unable to engage in collective goals; they rapidly left agriculture for the easier ways of commerce; and when they persisted in agriculture, they chose the wrong crops and the wrong timing. In sum, nothing was good and there was no real support from the state besides the initial help in kind and travel. Even those who were fully sponsored by the government, like the soldiers, had to endure immense difficulties.

Low-rank soldiers and convicts, unsuited for the purpose of community building, had been the majority of the Portuguese sent to Angola. But there were others too. At some point, the Portuguese government had sponsored the settlement of migrants from other countries, attracting a group of Germans into southern Angola in the 1860s. However, in spite of their claims about having masonry and carpentry skills, they were not even able to build proper homes, something that was part of the migration contract (Silva, 1973: 313). There were also some reckless youth from institutions, like the group of youngsters from *Casa Pia*, an institution for orphans and paupers, who followed the German contingent in the 1860s; they, too, were seen as rebellious and did not help in a proper settlement. And there were the fishermen from Algarve, the distinct
southernmost province of Portugal often subject to prejudice by other Portuguese fellows. A few contingents of Algarvians from Faro and Olhão had sailed in their own boats to the Moçâmbedes coast and settled there for fishing activities, which until then had only been carried out by Africans. They did not plan to make it into the plateau.

Adding to this variety, there were some clergy sent to the area – but even those, chroniclers say, had gone there as a punishment for immoral behaviour elsewhere (Silva, 1973: 339).

With so much repeated failure, it makes sense to ask: why did the settlement of Madeiran islanders succeed where the others had not? Historians of the Moçâmbedes/Huíla experience present it as a successful case of engineered colonialism with a premeditated change in tactics, like a controlled experiment of settlement devoted to success, fully proving that the white colonization of Africa was indeed possible. Raul Silva explicitly credits Pinheiro Chagas for the migration of Madeirans (Silva, 1972: 528; 1973: 342). The arguments used by the chroniclers refer to the correct choices of human stock and place, with the appropriate climate, suitable for the acclimatization of European species, whether vegetable, animal or human. Those two conditions, people and place, had been spelled out already in the eighteenth century by the Portuguese governor of Angola, Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, in words that most chroniclers regarded as the very beginning of the attempts to promote the white settlement of that site: “colonizar as terras altas angolanas, por meio de casais brancos de bôa gente e sabedores dos principais ofícios manuais” (to colonize the highlands of Angola with white couples of good people, familiarised with manual crafts). This phrase became, in a sense, the motto of the social engineering behind the late nineteenth century migrations.

It was clear that the Plateau of Huíla had a climate suited for European-style agriculture and for European bodies, and was therefore appropriate for acclimatization and for the development of farming communities. But why would Madeirans provide the ideal settlers?

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Although the Moçâmbedes/Huíla saga is portrayed in secondary sources as a successfully organized settlement that was part of a larger colonial program, the study of primary sources shows otherwise. Rather than a
part of a structured program, it appears as a rushed response to an imagined threat, within the military inspired logic of conquest, defence, and invasion. The adversaries were not the resident Africans, even though there were violent episodes of native resistance in the 1850s–60s (Pelissier, 1998; Silva, 1972). For the Portuguese, the threat came from other European settlers, like the Boers marching into the territory. The Boer nomadic drift ("Northern Trek") had led them to settle temporarily in places claimed by the Portuguese, one of them being Humpata. One century later they were remembered as a terrifying group: "commanded by a certain 'captain Botha', they killed and devastated the peoples of the region" (Silva, 1972: 525). In the context of a mounting tension between Europeans about African land, the Boers and the British – "a constant fear all through the occupation of Angola", as portrayed by Silva (1971: 371) – were the strong motive for a change in the Portuguese colonial policies over the area.

Until the 1880s, the colonization of Africa was not a main political agenda for the Portuguese. Many among the intelligentsia and politicians thought that the African colonies were a nuisance rather than an asset. Some advocated their sale to other European potencies. Things changed with the 1890 British ultimatum against Portugal, in the aftermath of the Berlin Conference. That memo invited the Portuguese to give up their claims about the lands between Angola and Mozambique, either by will or by force. Taken as a national humiliation, the ultimatum stood at the root of a change in attitude, and from then on politicians were able to manipulate the nation into pro-colonial policies. But before the ultimatum Africa was neither a political priority nor a popular destination for migrants in search of work and better lives. They would rather go to the New World. Madeirans, for instance, would go as far as the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and endure the harshness of indentured labour, just a step above slavery.

The Portuguese politicians who advocated pro-colonial positions had to develop strong arguments in order to persuade the parliament and government of their purposes. One of the most used arguments resounded of biopolitics: redirecting towards the colonies the flows of migrants that departed from Portugal. Lives should be kept under national territory, not feeding the workforce of the rival nations and enriching them. The idea slowly gained support in the parliament and appeared in the legislation in 1881, the decade when the scramble for Africa was peaking.
... the emigration of the kingdom’s continent and adjacent islands goes to inhospitable lands, where Portuguese citizens, generally subject to lion contracts, go, pushed by misery, seek in the hard labour of settlers and servants, so many diseases, fatigue, and often death itself.

More than once in the parliament and in the press there has been the expression of the need to call into our vast overseas domains the currents of emigration that impoverish the country, by stealing them of their more robust hands.

More than once opinion has demanded from the public powers to respond to the situation of these disgraced beings, whom, by not finding in their motherland neither property nor work go, often, subject themselves to a true slavery, disguised under the colours of freely arranged conventions.

(Diário de Governo, 1881, #185, August 20)

RE-ROUTING PEOPLE TO AFRICA

The government tried to make African destinations more attractive by advertising the good qualities of some African places and announcing consistent material support to the settlers. Announcements were posted in the different Portuguese districts. In Braga, for instance, the governor Jeronymo da Cunha Pimentel announced on 14 February, 1884, that the vessel India would bring up to 50 settlers to the district of Moçâmedes, in Angola. Up to eight from Braga could be included. Candidates were directed to sign the contract in town and present themselves to the Ministry of Navy and Overseas for departure by the following 22nd – which gave them only a week! (Governo Civil de Braga, 1884).

The advertisements called for “valid men,” under the age of 35, preferably married, who were farmers or farming-related artisans, such as carpenters, masons, ironsmiths. In sum, the government tried to attract healthy bodies, both on physical and social grounds. In turn, the migrants were offered the sum of 30,000 R., free transport, and a number of tools, including a gun, an axe, a shovel, a hoe, and basic household ware. The government also assured them protection and guidance into a desirable destination:

at arrival in Angola, the settlers will be under the protection of the emigrants office, which will give them the appropriate destiny in the district of Moçâmedes, which is, as everyone knows, very healthy, rich and with
all the conditions of the best European countries, where they will have protection of the authorities and the convenience of those who speak the same language and share the same motherland.”

Few responded to the appeals. In the list of migrants aboard the India when it left Portugal on 1 March 1884, only three settlers-to-be had signed the term in Braga (Luiz da Silva, from Vila Flor, Bragança; Domingos Machado, from Famaicão, and Antonio Soares, from Braga). One man had signed it in Viseu and seven had done so at the ministry. In addition, there were nine who had signed in Funchal, Madeira (but one, in fact, came in a later contingent). This is documented by a few telegrams between Funchal and Lisbon, that show the willingness of Madeirans to leave the island. Of that total of 20, some were lost – either they died or went after non-agricultural destinies once off the boat.

This early 1884 episode remains unacknowledged by the historians who wrote about the saga. They typically refer only to the trip of the vessel India in October-November of that year. Without ever explaining why the contingent of settlers was composed solely of Madeirans, Raul Silva, who otherwise provides a detailed account of the white colonization of Southern Angola, simply refers to the fact that,

> When Manuel Pinheiro Chagas took the foreign Overseas and Navy office the rhythm of the Angolan colonization accelerated … This minister sent to the south Angolan lands the first Madeiran colony, composed of 222 individuals of both sexes. Embarked on the vessel India, they set foot in Moçâmbe in November 18, 1884, and established for good in Lubango in January 19, 1885, under the direction of Sir José Augusto da Câmara Leme (Silva, 1972: 528).

But now we know why. In a rushed attempt to settle southern Angola with Portuguese countrymen, Madeirans were the only ones ready to embark without hesitation into the uncertain destiny. The November trip skipped mainland Portugal. There were over two hundred Madeirans eager to leave home and go anywhere.

**WHY MADEIRANS**

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Madeirans were probably the most disenfranchised among those who searched for labour and land outside Portugal. Since the 1830s they endured the challenges of travelling to different and distant environments as Guyana and Hawaii
(Ferreira, 2001; Spranger, 2001). To Hawaii they had to sail all through the Atlantic, go around the Cape Horne, sail back north across the Pacific, and then endure the harshness of labour in the sugar cane plantations. In Guyana there was also labour in the cane fields waiting for them. British plantation owners in the recently emancipated colony (1831) rapidly replaced slave labour by indentured labour. In the years 1834–35, plantation owners imported a few hundred Portuguese from the Azores and Madeira, a source that was staunchly by the Portuguese government to be revived in 1841 and combined with the importation of labour from the India and the West Indies (Wagner, 1977: 408–9). Indentured labour was complemented by an almost constant flow of economic-driven migration, to which Madeira contribute steadily. Once in Guyana, Madeirans also got engaged in small commerce (Laurence, 1965; Wagner, 1977). Hardly seen as “Europeans” (Wagner, 1977: 411), they also became a target for angry riots against shopkeepers (Wagner, 1977: 415).

Madeirans also embarked early to the United States and to Trinidad, both for religious reasons7 and as labourers (Ferreira, 2001; Fernandes, 2004). In the twentieth century, their destinies included South Africa and South America. Southern Angola was one other destiny among a succession of different places, but one that came with a distinct feature: it was sponsored by the Portuguese government, as part of a strategy for land occupation in the context of the European scramble for Africa.

Madeirans were ready to leave their land, and for that reason the second trip of the vessel India in our saga started already in Funchal, Madeira. In October/November 1884, about 250 people left the island for Moçâmedes (Almeida, 1885). Officially, the contingent was composed of 20 operarios (labourers), plus 15 family members and 70 settlers, as well as 116 of their family members, 66 of whom were children (Silva, 1884; Almeida, 1884-5). These were not alone, however. The day after they left Funchal, another 20 Madeirans were found on board. They had embarked illegally, and in the next stop, in Cape Verde, the captain waited for telegraphic instructions from the government in Lisbon. They all ultimately continued on to Moçâmedes anyway, making the 200 plus contingent that most chroniclers report.

The ship arrived at Moçâmedes in November 1884 and the future settlers were housed in four barracks – two for the families, one for the older girls, and another one for unmarried men and boys – built for the occasion. Following plans to cross the mountains that stood in their way, they reached the Huîla plateau in January 1885. Some among them
stayed in Lubango, some went to Humpata, and some founded the small colony of São Pedro da Chibia. Three years later they were the cover story of the Lisbon newspaper *Colonias Portuguesas*, one of the few pro-colonial periodicals in Portugal at the time.

The newspaper commented that this was the only successful case among the Portuguese attempts to colonize Africa in current times. The article suggested that this case should provide an example for further efforts:

> It is there that several colonies have kept and prospered, it is there that the reproduction of the white race and the joyful and healthy living of the European migrants speak louder than any study about African regions and climates, encouraging us to send there all those who in the motherland do not find easy ways to provide their own subsistence.\(^8\)

Despite the joyful tone of the reports of *Colonias Portuguesas*, and the many glorified reports produced by twentieth century historians, geographers and physical anthropologists, the life of Madeirans in their early
Displaced bodies

POLÍTICA COLONIAL PORTUGUEZA

Vae abrir-se o parlamento e iniciar-se por tanta um período, que deverá inexistente ser de incentivo actividade política.

Se asíndromos unicamente às circunstâncias actuais, se nós lhes instruímos apenas das responsabilidades que nos impõe a situação presente, por certo que a futura sessão legislativa se ocupará com muito particular empenho de todo quanto interessasse o nosso domínio colonial.

Algumas talvez se objeem que, porque os notórios e insólito procedimento da Inglaterra, é inutil trabalhar e lutar com interesse na progresso das colónias, propondo por todos os modos o seu desenvolvimento, visto como nada nos ser dada realizar, ou aquela paiz assimilar a vellesidade ou a ambicção de se aposar de qualquer trase de terras que nos pertença e que lhe pareciam boas condições para satisfazer qualquer projeto ou qualquer combinação financeira ou política. Seria uma loucura pensar assim.

Além de que os acróis, como o ultimum ét de 01 de janeiro, não se reproduzem impunemente, e a Inglaterra há de pensar muito primeiramente que de outra vez segurou por tal torturoso caimento; a verdade é que, quanto menos demonstrações de influência e de domínio tivermos a apresentar, mais preestimo daremos às criaturas inglesas, e as desilusões investidas dos nossos inimigos.

Se o nosso renascimento colonial houve-se começado há mais tempo, se todos os partidos políticos de Portugal se houverem dado às mãos para afastar do terreno das discussões facétias ou assumptos coloniais, se a imprudência de uns, a leviandade de outros, e a ignóncia de muitos não houverem embriagado e por vezes tumultuado muitos deliberações, pode quasi assegurar-se que a Inglaterra não teria tido ocasião para nos vencer a cruel adversidade que nos foi infligida em 01 de janeiro.

Teria a sua ambição procurado outra pretexto, mas a violência precisaria de ser ainda mais caracterizada, e aínde as mais audazes e os mais desejos de espraiulhos se expressarem.

(Source: Lisbon Geographical Society & F. Ladeira)
years in Huíla was not at all easy. Their trip had not been easy to begin with, and that is well documented by the writings of the physician on board, Dr. Alexandre Almeida. While the writings of the captain refer solely to the condition of the ocean, winds, distance, speed, motor repairs and harbours, the physician’s writings were pungent depictions of the passengers’ experience.

SURVEILLING THE MOVING BODIES

The first comment of the naval physician Alexandre Almeida regarding the Madeirans aboard the *India* reveals his doubts about the appropriateness of their bodies for settling and cultivating the land. He wondered whether they had been subject to any sort of physical selection (Almeida, 1884–5), which they had not. Decades later, a governor of the district, João Almeida, goes to the point of suggesting that it seemed as though Madeira had just gotten rid of its worst types by sending them off to Angola (Almeida, 1912).

To the physician on board the *India*, the bodies of the future settlers seemed just wrong for the purpose: wrong age, either too old or too young, and wrong body skills. They had not been selected correctly for biopolitical purposes. Their bodies did not seem up to the task of expanding the nation and building empire by settling themselves and administering the land and living world. Among those onboard, some were extreme cases, like the ones who embarked illegally and showed up a few days later asking for food. They were a total of 24, in total indigence, deprived even of clothing. “Escaping the misery of their homeland,” maybe motivated “by the love of the unknown” and the “desire of seeing lands,” in Dr. Almeida’s words, their health was in ruins, and their life expectancy too short. Some among them would willingly abandon the trip in the Capeverdian island of São Vicente.

The physician elaborated extensively on the adaptations needed on the vessel in order to provide a better and healthier trip to the passengers. As it was, they were forced to breathe improper air, due to poor ventilation, and endure unnecessary dampness, due to the sailor’s habits of throwing buckets of water as a method of cleaning. In spite of all this, the health condition of the passengers was considered regular and stable. One only death happened during their brief stop in Luanda to fix the engine and clean the vessel thoroughly. It was an 8-month old infant who had come on board already in ill health, showing the symptoms of
profound anemia, refusing alternatives to the mother’s weakened milk, and slowly falling into an uninterrupted sleep that lead to death. But there was a counterpart to that: on the day they left Luanda a Madeiran woman gave birth to a baby girl who they named “Maria India.”

The vessel *India* continued sailing to South Africa and Mozambique and back after leaving the Madeirans in Moçâmedes. There, the Madeirans started a new chapter of their lives. The hardships of life were not left behind in the island: they were to see many more difficulties ahead, including being thrown upon a plateau whose farming would be different from what they were used to in their subtropical island. One of the ironies was that the African climate in the highlands was much colder than what they knew and expected. Everything in them seemed inappropriate and medical reports were easy in dismissing them by criticizing their food choices: how could they prefer a vegetable-based diet of yams and sweet potatoes when the land allowed for cattle raising and meat consumption, as did the Boers and some native groups?

**ADAPTATION AND DEGENERATION ASSESSED BY COLONIAL MEDICINE**

One of the sharpest examples of the biomedical assessment of the Madeirans performance upon their early arrival comes in the medical reports of the Moçâmedes sanitary district signed by Joaquim Bernardo Cardoso Botelho in 1895 and 1896. Botelho was particularly insulting to the Madeirans: in 1896, in a long digression on acclimatization, he described them as “indolent,” “pariahs” and “unsuited for colonization.” Being “lazy, drunk, immoral and dirty,” Madeirans – with some exceptions – did not have “one quality that brings them above the blacks from whom they only differentiate by colour” (Botelho, 1896).

Among his comments were assumptions and beliefs about race and human flexibility that reflected both scientific theories and a few of the floating prejudices and commonsense ideas that Europeans had about themselves and about Africans regarding issues of body, health, race and environment. Botelho was immersed in the discussions about acclimatisation. He distinguished between *aclimatação* and *aclimatamento*, referring, respectively, to the individual processes of adaptation and the promotion of policies towards that goal, or to the “adaptation of race.” Simplifying the discussion by choosing *aclimatation*, he considered that its study should be a political priority which required cooperation.
between the government and medical entities. To guarantee a successful colonization, the health and bodies of migrants should be monitored ever since they registered to leave. In other words: biopower as phrased by a nineteenth century colonial physician in southern Angola.

Botelho elaborated on the procedures towards adequate and appropriate monitoring of the settlers’ health and the simultaneous development of acclimatisation studies. It should all begin at the moment of recruitment: the future settlers should first get a detailed medical account of their physical condition written by the physician of their home town. Then the report should be brought to a medical inspection in Lisbon, reviewed and annotated. The document should then be sent to the health services of the colony of destination, and provided to the local colonial physician. This person should then monitor the health of the settler and report all possible details to the colony health services, who in turn should report them back to Lisbon. Only in this manner could the studies of acclimatisation be accomplished.

That was a fantasy of colonial biopower which was never implemented; yet it reveals the beliefs on acclimatisation as a branch of biomedical knowledge. In Botelho’s writings, those beliefs co-existed with several others – what were then the scientific views on race, the pervasive background notions about human flexibility, and the European fears about tropical climates and African settings. Even though inter-tropical, the Moçâmèdes district had places with European-like climate. Botelho argued that clinical observations indicated the influence of the Moçâmèdes climate over the white race, “and therefore the adaptability of that race to that climate.” Reviewing the different flows of migrants that arrived to the area and their bodily responses, Botelho concluded that “the acclimisation of the white individuals in Moçâmèdes is incomplete, less imperfect than in other sites in the province, except in the plateau of Moçâmèdes” (Botelho, 1896).

In his words, the “white race” of the district suffered from a generalized asthenia, caused by a slow impoverishing of the organism. One of the symptoms of the impoverishing of the race (depauperamento da raça) was the fact that women were prone to hysteria when getting close to puberty. Using the jargon common to medicine and physical anthropology of his day, he noted that the transplanted human bodies had gone down from the strong constitution of their original types, lymphatic-sanguineous, to the debilities of a nervous-lymphatic type. Botelho was so prejudiced about the Madeirans that in his study of acclimatisation he
included in the original types those from Beira Alta, Trás-os-Montes, Minho, Douro and Azores – that is, those who had originated in the Northern parts of the country and had landed in Moçâmedes probably via Brazil – and explicitly excluded the Madeirans, whom he saw as useless pariahs.

The spectre of degeneration was alive and well in Botelho’s thoughts and writings, to the point of recommending that the descendents of the settlers should intermarry with uncorrupted whites coming from Europe. This was a topic that lingered well into the twentieth century, with or without the support of physical anthropologists and their measuring compasses. Similar issues were addressed in the context of French and British colonialism (Jennings, 2006; Kennedy, 1987, 1996).

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: PHYSICAL ANTHROPOLOGY, ADAPTATION AND RACE

Decades after Botelho’s reports, the descendents of the Madeira settlers were measured by the metal compasses of physician and physical anthropologist Germano Correia, who served in Angola in 1922–23 (Correia, 1925, 1930, 1934). The children and grandchildren of those who had been expected to degenerate were now applauded as the epitome of the extreme adaptability of the Portuguese to the tropics. The “Luso-Angolans” had not succumbed to tropical illnesses; they had not mixed with the local population; they had not decayed in any sense; according to the “scientific measurement” of their bodies, their condition had improved in an inter-tropical zone.

For Correia, they were the ultimate proof that white colonization of Africa was possible and viable, and, contrary to widespread beliefs, might “improve the race.” He used this case to elaborate endlessly on the virtues of a scientific colonization. In his views, colonization could not be carried in the amateurish and ignorant ways done by many European nations. By sending their nationals to settle in inhospitable lands, like the French in Guyana, they had seen nothing but massive death and degeneration. To overcome those problems, colonisation should be developed “scientifically.”

The case of the Huila Luso-Angolans was also used to support Correia’s views on race and white supremacy. He spoke and wrote to audiences who might question the viability of creating European settlements in
Africa. Europeans should and could do it, and he was showing them how. Needless to say, both speaker and audience disregarded at all levels that the place was actually inhabited by Africans. It was all about moving Europeans there.

Correia’s data on Luso-Angolans were insufficient to make scientific claims about their “acclimatization”; he had only measured 23 subjects. Trained in the Laboratoire d’Anthropologie in Paris after graduating in medicine from the Medical Schools of Goa in 1909 and Porto in 1912, with further training on the Tropical Medicine Institute in Lisbon, he was aware of the standards of validity for scientific work. However, he could not help his enthusiasm about the case of Luso-Angolans, whom he saw as potentially strengthening the argument he had developed for the Luso-Descendents of Goa, India (Correia, 1919, 1920, 1928, 1931, 1945–46). His enthusiasm is better understood once we know that he was a part of that group, seen as a minority who claimed supremacy within the context of Indo-Portuguese society (Bastos, 2003, 2005). He suggested that the Portuguese in the tropics improved their race by not interbreeding with the natives; he was still fighting against the prejudice that hung over him and over the Portuguese in general, regarded by other Europeans as hybrids who had mixed too much with the natives of tropical lands.

Correia’s views were like an upside down “luso-tropicalism,” the very opposite of Gilberto Freyre’s apology of miscegenation developed a few decades later (see Bastos, 2003). Freyre claimed that the very essence and originality of Brazilian society lay in the hybridization promoted by the Portuguese colonizers, who had gone around the world mixing with other peoples and creating a new universe of mulattoes and creoles. Like Freyre’s luso-tropicalism, even though looking the inverse, Correia’s attempts to theorize about the Portuguese adaptation to the tropics were a sort of blending of ethnic pride and imperialism in response to the accusations of degeneration by hybridism and miscegenation that hung over anyone of Portuguese descent in Africa and Asia.

Correia’s future in the history of ideas was a dead-end. His views on human fitness and race were critically close to those upon which eugenistic ideals developed, leading to some of the horrors of the twentieth century. His works – particularly those about the Luso-Angolans – should be kept as a reminder of the dangerous liaisons between science, ideology and power as enacted by the relationship between physical anthropology, racialism, acclimatisation and colonial biopower.
INTO THE 21ST CENTURY: MEDICALISED PREJUDICE AND THE BIOPOLITICS OF MIGRATION

Such dangerous liaisons are not a mere curiosity from the past. Like the theories of miasma that survived long after the general acceptance of germ theory, whether explicitly or underground, so the ideas associating physical fitness, adaptation and “race” that were developed by Europeans who studied displaced populations in the tropics are still around us, haunting representations about migrants and illness in the contemporary world. “The perennial problem of medicalised prejudice,” as Alan Kraut (1997) puts it, affected southern Italians migrating to the United States as well, and many others to come all through the twentieth century and into the 21st (Markel and Stern, 2002). Medical language is easily embeddable with prejudice regarding migrants. Cultural fears and persistent xenophobia pave the way to discourses that in the past insisted on physical fitness, degeneration or appropriateness, and in the present are associated with carrying diseases, modern epidemics and, again, threats of dissolution.

In a world where human mobility has accelerated drastically, when northerners travel south and southerners go north, east goes west and west goes east, it remains under the control of the established powers – as if in a new form of empire – to define danger and assign it to people and groups, to spell out who is dangerous and who is in danger, providing elements to the broth in which the “scientific” basis for the new biopolitics of migration and mobility will take shape.

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NOTES

1. *Islands of White* (Kennedy, 1987) provides a preciously documented comparison of the Anglophone white settlements of Rhodesia and Kenya that started not too long afterwards. The obscure Huila experience, in all its fragility and helplessness, was, at least chronologically, a pioneering one.
2. *Assimilados* (literally “assimilated”) were the native individuals who had adopted a certain degree of the colonizer’s culture (language, religion, rituals, dress codes, table manners, etc.), implicitly rejecting their ancestors’ culture. The condition of *assimilado* could be achieved by an exam and certificate. Only the *assimilados* counted as citizens and were granted the rights denied to the “natives”.
3. The Foundation of Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa (Geographic Society of Lisbon) in 1875 explicitly addressed the need to know better the African inland. In direct competition with its colonial rivals, the Portuguese government sponsored in 1877 the explorations of Serpa Pinto, Hermenegildo Capelo and Roberto Ivens from the coast of Angola to that of Mozambique. They used navigation techniques in what was then unchartered territory for Europeans. In 1884–85, Capelo and Ivens completed the crossing of the hinterland between Huila, in southern Angola, and Quelimane, in Mozambique (Capelo and Ivens, 1886).
4. It remains to be investigated whether Abreu was himself the abolitionist that some of his chroniclers refer to, or merely another slaveholder that exploited the system to its limits.
5. Some authors extended the deprecation into Madeirans, depicted as “a scum of drunks and hoodlums” (Nascimento, 1909, *apud* Silva, 1972b: 435).
7. Already in the eighteenth century a group of Madeirans had converted from Catholicism to a protestant church and followed their leader, ending up in Illinois via Trinidad (See Fernandes, 2004).
9. I thank POCTI/ANT/41075/2001 project research assistant Monica Saavedra for the transcriptions of those diaries.

10. In his words, there were some “valetudinarians”, some “into age”, many without the necessary fitness for the agricultural work; many were just too young, and some had skills or arts that were useless for the taking off of a new colony.

11. In a recent visit to the area I was able to identify the tomb of Maria Índia at the “Boer cemetery” of Humpata, in which most of the tombs are actually from Portuguese settlers. Maria Índia’s tomb had a peculiar cement cover and contours; the scribe referred to her birth in Moçâmedes, 1883; she actually arrived to Moçâmedes already as a newborn, and it was in November 1884. I am very thankful to Rosa Melo and to her relatives Sandra and Dionisio, from Lubango, for the opportunity of wandering around Humpata in November 2005.

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