

# Preliminary Considerations on European Forced Labor in Angola, 1880-1930: Individual Redemption and the "Effective Occupation" of the Colony<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Forced colonization of Angola using European convicts from 1880 to 1930 was a bold experiment by the Lisbon authorities, motivated by an increasing population of criminals and the international scramble for colonies in Africa. It held the promise of solving both these dilemmas while providing the labor needed for development.

"If we hope to develop a colony, it is a fact that this is not achieved with forced penal colonization..." (Junior 16).

## Introduction

This article stands at the crossroads of two large avenues of historical writing on the nineteenth century: penal reform and New Imperialism. To date, this has been a lonely and rather obscure corner in the literature, especially on the Portuguese in Africa. This article will outline how (largely) white European forced labor provided by convicts became commonplace in the Angolan colony by the end of the nineteenth and first thirty years of the twentieth centuries. The process of exiling convict labor to Angola sheds light on several aspects of Portuguese society, penal reform in Portugal, and the overall colonization efforts of the Portuguese in Africa, especially Angola. Penal exiles (*degradados*) sent by the Portuguese judicial system to the African colonies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are yet another link

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*Portuguese Literary & Cultural Studies* 15/16 (2010): 79-105.

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that connected Portugal to its African holdings. *Degradados* also formed links between and among colonies. Aspects of crime, criminals, and criminality in Portugal are really only now being explored by social scientists. The very important connections they formed have not yet received the attention they merit. This is equally true for both the early modern and modern periods.<sup>2</sup>

This project developed from my previous work on early modern crime, convicts, and forced and state-sponsored colonization. After concluding at 1755, I began to question what happened to the use of *degredo* (penal exile) after that date. Part of that answer was the use of internal exile within Portugal to the little town of Castro Marim (see below). However, internal exile and what I call “The Castro Marim story” then led me to penal reform in nineteenth century Portugal and the creation of the *Depósito Geral de Degradados* in Luanda (see below). This imperial prison housed convicts (mostly) from Portugal, from all the other colonies (except Mozambique, which had its own prison), as well as foreign criminals sentenced by Portuguese courts. The creation of the *Depósito* was the last and one of the most creative phases of the Portuguese use of exile as punishment.<sup>3</sup>

The research for this work has been planned in three stages. This article appears at the end of the intermediate stage, after my research in Lisbon was completed. Many of the more interesting questions, and certainly much more about the individual convicts and the day-to-day running of the *Depósito*, will only be possible to investigate after consulting archival material in Luanda: the final phase of this study. Hence, the use of *preliminary* in the title. This article will not be able to answer all the questions it raises. It will, however, describe the overall situation, take a first look at some numbers, and speculate about their meaning and impact in the colony of Angola.

### A problem of sources

One of the major frustrations, as well as rewards, of this study is that it covers a new area of research on Lusophone Africa. There are very few pertinent secondary sources. I have already mentioned above the lack of works on crime and criminality. Studies done on Angola during this period (1880-1930) have little or nothing to say about the *Depósito*. In spite of their relatively large numbers, *degradados* are sometimes mentioned but only in passing. There have been no studies done on either the *Depósito* as an institution or the impact of its inmates and their labor in Angola. Understandably, historians of Angola have focused on much broader issues affecting greater num-

bers of the African population, such as the forced labor of Angolans, resistance to colonial rule, and the struggles for independence. Nevertheless, there are two welcome exceptions to this overall pattern. Gerald Bender's seminal study of the failure of Portuguese colonization in Angola, *Angola Under the Portuguese*, includes a discussion about *degradados* and the *Depósito*. One of the requirements of the commander of the *Depósito* was to submit an annual report to the military High Command in Luanda. One such report, Junior's *O Depósito de Degradados*, was published in 1916 and contains a great deal of information about the institution. However, his report ended in 1915 and is not an institutional study, nor was it intended as such. The availability of primary sources is not as clear. The *Depósito* and the Angolan military that administered it produced massive amounts of documentation. Some of this material (a very small percentage I suspect) made its way to Lisbon and is scattered among the holdings of the *Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo* (ANTT), the *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino* (AHU, where at least in theory all the material should be held), and the *Arquivo Histórico Militar*. Criminal records, as well as several batches of appeals from *Depósito* inmates, are held as well in the ANTT. The military sections of the *caixas* (boxes of loose documents) of Angolan materials in the AHU for this period are notable for containing virtually nothing from the *Depósito*.

As a result, this study has had to start at square one, determining answers to the most fundamental questions: how many *degradados* were sent to Portuguese Africa from 1822-1932? How many of these were sent to Angola? How many were registered in the *Depósito*? What crimes did these convicts commit and what sentences did they receive? What was their overall presence in the colony? What did they do while there? How were they supervised and what was their daily reality in Luanda? Did they become the colonizers envisioned by Lisbon? Why or why not? These are the questions that go to heart of this study. Before turning to those, a few words about the historical background of exile and its importance and longevity in the Portuguese world can lead us to Angola and the *Depósito* in the 1880s.

### The punishment of exile in Portuguese society

Forced exile (*degrado*) was a constant feature of Portuguese society from the creation of the nation state in the High Middle Ages. Prior to 1415 and the beginnings of Portuguese expansion overseas, *degrado* was instituted in the legal codes as internal exile to one of several towns or villages along the bor-

der with the other Iberian kingdoms (i.e., Galicia, León, Extremadura/Castilla, and Andalucía). Typically, each town had a cap placed by the crown as to how many *degredados* could reside there. Frequently, those *degredados* convicted of more serious crimes (e.g., heresy, treason) might be excluded from some towns and specifically directed to others. With the conquest of Ceuta in 1415 and the Portuguese push into the south Atlantic, the judicial system incorporated some of these new holdings as sites to receive convicts. After the Inquisition was established in Portugal, its tribunals coordinated their sentences of exile for sinners with the manpower requirements of the state. Convicts and sinners manned the navy's galleys, while others staffed many of the forts and other outposts in the Portuguese Atlantic, such as Cacheu (Guiné), Luanda, and forts in the interior of Angola along the Cuanza River. No site could rival São Tomé Island. Its economic importance in both the developing Atlantic slave trade and sugar production made it an important outpost of the Portuguese Atlantic. Because of the tropical diseases faced by Europeans who attempted to reside there, São Tomé quickly became a quasi-penal colony during early modern times. Convicts and sinners from mainland Portugal were exiled there in (relatively) large numbers. They, in turn, supervised slaves laboring to produce sugar.

By the 1650s, *degredados* were omnipresent throughout the global Portuguese Empire, and the sentence of *degredo* was handed down with great frequency by the High Courts in Porto, Lisbon, Salvador, and Goa. Later these would be joined by a fifth court established in Rio de Janeiro. Criminals from Portugal were sent where their presence could achieve the maximum for the crown and where free immigration could not attract sufficient colonizers. This meant the few remaining presidios in North and West Africa, Cape Verde, São Tomé, Luanda, and the fringes of the Brazilian colony (Maranhão, Nova Colônia do Sacramento) all received European and Brazilian convicts up to the time of Brazilian independence in 1822-24. In Asia, the High Court in Goa sent its criminals to remote locations along the Indian Ocean littoral. In keeping with the overall patterns established by the European courts, the more serious the crime, the more distant (from the court) the site of exile. In Asia, this meant Mozambique Island or perhaps Timor. Minor infractions were punished with internal exile. In Asia, this might mean a sentence to Diu. In Brazil, it might mean being forced to live in Rio Grande do Norte. In Portugal itself, internal exile came to mean obligatory residence in the little town of Castro Marim, in the extreme SE corner of the Algarve.

Notably, exile to Angola during early modern times was reserved for serious criminals. A sentence of five to eight years in São Tomé or Angola, or ten years in the galleys was, in reality, a life sentence.<sup>4</sup>

This loosely structured system worked remarkably well throughout the early modern period. Judicial costs were part of the sentence whenever the convict could afford to pay them. The system cost the state very little, other than transportation. Oversight was minimal. Convicts had the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves by providing labor (normally as soldiers) until they completed their sentences. Once that had occurred, convicts could obtain certificates of completion from local judges and return home or reside wherever they chose. The system also provided a powerful and effective method of social control. Those who transgressed society's norms would be sent far away, exiled from family, friends, hometown, and all the networks that supported him or her. Most convicts (then as now) were male but *degredadas* (female convicts) do appear here and there in the records. *Degredo* was a powerful double-edged sword: merciful but cruel. The punishment of *degredo* cast a long shadow over Portuguese society. Approximately 50,000 Portuguese convicts and sinners received this sentence by one of the courts during the 200 years from 1550 to 1755. Considering the small size of the Portuguese population (even including Brazil and the other colonies), *degredo* was a punishment with a powerful impact on the individual and an equally useful tool for maintaining the Empire (Coates, *Convicts* 183).

In the period from 1755 to Brazilian independence, Portuguese courts produced an additional 200 to 250 *degredados* annually. This would mean an additional 14,000 to 17,000 convicts were on the move in the Empire. Throughout the nineteenth century up to the 1880s, *degredados* were sent in fits and starts to any of the five remaining colonies in Africa. Internal exile continued to Castro Marim, at least until the 1850s.

Totals for this period (1824-80) are difficult to estimate because of the incomplete and piecemeal nature of the records. The early nineteenth century was not a fortuitous time in Portugal. The French invasions and civil war did nothing to aid in detailed record keeping. In 1823, there were 288 prisoners in Limoeiro (Lisbon's main jail) and Belém awaiting transport to Cape Verde (106), Angola (82), India (59), Benguela (22), Mozambique (13), Angoche (2), Príncipe (2), São Tomé (1), and Pará (1) (ANTT, MAEJ, maço 403, doc. 11). In the documentation that I have been able to find (summarized here as Table 1), Portuguese courts were sentencing approximately 285

convicts each year, to all the former colonies, including the Atlantic Islands and India. Another 20 to 25 convicts sentenced to internal exile in Castro Marim would have to be added to these figures, at least until the 1850s. This unplanned scattering of convict labor would come to a rather abrupt halt in the 1880s. By that point, the Portuguese State and Inquisition had sentenced approximately 115,000 people to some form of *degredo* in the Portuguese World from 1200 to 1880.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Exile Locations and Numbers of Portuguese Convicts Sentenced to Degredo from 1837 to 1872**

LOCATION	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
Terceira	1	0	1
Santa Maria	1	0	1
São Tiago	842	42	884
São Vicente	10	1	11
Guiné	18	0	18
São Tomé	627	13	640
Luanda	5,809	200	6,009
Ambriz	79	2	81
Moçâmedes	36	0	36
Benguela	0	160	160
Lourenço Marques	2	1	3
Moçambique	1,350	69	1,419
India	907	2	909
Total (%)	9,682 (95%)	489 (5%)	10,171

Source: ANTT, Ministério de Negócios Eclesiásticos e Justiça (hereafter MNEJ), folio 448, part 5

**Penal reform in Portugal**

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, the Portuguese legal code remained the *Ordenações Filipinas*, originally published in 1602. The course of the second half of the century saw the legal code reformed and modified. Each time, the code defined *degredo* overseas in more narrow and in more restricted terms until the logical outcome was the creation of overseas prisons designed to supervise *degredados* and their labor. The first major revision was

in 1852 and the only distinction in overseas locale was to either “western” or “eastern” (Portuguese) Africa. These distinctions signified the western (Atlantic) colonies of Cape Verde, Guiné, São Tomé, and Angola (called “first degree” *degreto*) versus the eastern or Indian Ocean colony of Mozambique (second degree). It was only when they were specifically sentenced to Portuguese Asia (i.e., India, Timor, and Macau) that European *degreddados* would not be sent to Africa. The major problem with this legal code was that it lacked any sort of direction, supervision, or intended purpose for the convict once he or she arrived in the colony. Additional legal reforms of 1864, 1867, 1884, and 1886 corrected this oversight and created the first real prisons in Portugal. New sentences linked prison time in Portugal to be followed by *degreto* to one of the African colonies. The death penalty was abolished in 1867 along with the punishment of public works. *Degredo* was seen as “a complimentary or auxiliary punishment, always temporary” (Moreira 152). By 1867, the various African *degreto* locales were further refined legally by the difficulty faced by Europeans to adapt to their climates. Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Luanda, and Moçâmedes were the easier, first degree sites. Bissau, Cacheu, Benguela and Mozambique (Island) were the more difficult, second degree locations.

Included in the 1869 reforms was the overseas penal colony, “instituted especially for the moral expiation of the delinquent” (Moreira 157).<sup>6</sup> The solution was to create an overseas prison designed to achieve this lofty goal. This was the legal background that led to the creation of the *Depósito* in Luanda and eventually a second similar (but more modest) *depósito* on Mozambique Island.

The mission of penal reform and the redemption of the “corrupted” individual (i.e., the convict) through lengthy reflection over time (i.e., penitence) in a penitentiary followed by supervised work overseas was then augmented and became the solution to several practical problems:

Europe finds itself with an enormous number of criminals, not knowing what to do with them after abolishing the death penalty [...] the current political environment among nations, which translates into struggles for colonies [...] the labor crises caused by the lack of indigenous labor [...] and finally the Latin fantasy [...] of colonial assimilation are the main causes that allow convict labor, something that is both useful to the colony and which regenerates the delinquent. (Telles 8)

Therefore, many aspects of penal reform in nineteenth century Portugal supported the continuation of a centuries-long practice now linked with penal transportation to the colonies. In 1883, *degredados* were prohibited from being sent to Lourenço Marques, since they “escaped to the Transvaal and prejudiced the development of the city and the good name of the province [of Mozambique]” (Moreira 165). In 1862, convicts from Cape Verde were no longer sent to São Tomé, and, in 1872, they were banned from the island of São Vicente (Cape Verde). By the 1880s, Angola became the colony of choice and the former military presidio of São Miguel was transformed into the overseas penitentiary envisioned by lawmakers. However, not just lawmakers had turned their attention to the colonies in Africa. “From the 1870s to 1910, a more complex and diversified urban bourgeoisie moved to the center of the political stage in Portugal, with a much more direct interest in the colonies” (Clarence-Smith, “Myth” 172). Legal scholars, lawmakers, those interested in penal reform, politicians, businessmen, and others began to focus on penal reform and the emerging Portuguese solution of forced colonization of Portuguese Africa, especially Angola. Clarence-Smith has very clearly and succinctly outlined this combination of Portuguese interests, which formed before the Treaty of Berlin, leading to what he calls, “aggressive Portuguese Expansionism” (Clarence-Smith, “Portuguese” 172).

One of the more articulate positions on this subject was adopted by Francisco Xavier da Silva Telles, the Secretary-General of the *Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa* (not surprisingly one of the principal organizations encouraging Portuguese colonial development). Silva Telles had some first-hand experience in Angola with *degredados*, working there as a medical doctor. In 1901, as the head of the Lisbon Geographical Society, he organized a conference on Penal Transportation and Colonization. Two years later, he published a long article with the same title in which he developed the pros and cons of penal transportation as then currently practiced by the Portuguese in their African colonies. Silva Telles made a number of fine distinctions among the various types of convicts sent to Africa. Vagrants and others called *addidos* were not part of the official statistics he used to compile his overall totals (see Table 3). Also excluded were *deportados*, or deportees (most guilty of political crimes, especially anarchism). In addition, his figures (the official government statistics) ignore *degredados* already in the Angolan colony before 1883 as well as military *degredados* (Telles 36-37).

The realities of the Angolan colony

The second half of the nineteenth century in Angola was a time of economic transition. The end of the slave trade (by 1850) had temporarily stunted the local economy and agricultural production for export from the colony was slow to develop. In 1844, exports were at a low of 201 *contos* (201,000\$00). “Coffee, palm oil, palm kernels, and groundnuts in northern Angola, and cotton in southern Angola, were the main staples which replaced slaves during these years, together with ivory, wax, and rubber from the far interior. In 1874, Angola’s exports reached a peak of 2,671 *contos*, compared to 830 *contos* in 1825 at the height of the Atlantic slave trade” (Clarence-Smith, “Myth” 169).<sup>7</sup>

A more effective administration of the colony was needed, combined with an improved infrastructure for Luanda (port, roads, waterworks, etc.) as well as for the colony as a whole (e.g., railroads, copper mines). Additional troops were need for the colonial army. Convicts would provide part of the labor needed to achieve these overall goals, to provide “the obligation to ensure the establishment of authority” required in the Treaty of Berlin.

The European/Portuguese segment of the population of Luanda during this period was modest. As can be noted in Table 2, in the period from 1880 to 1930, the percentage of the European population reached its peak of 32% in 1898. Far more typical were the figures for the other years, which are all below 15% of the total. While the total numbers of *degradados* were modest when compared with these figures, they formed a significant element of the European population, especially in Luanda. Orlando Ribeiro has estimated that “At the end of the nineteenth century, *degradados* represented 12% of the white population, living in Luanda with a startling liberty. Many were owners of restaurants” (Ribeiro 132). As we shall see, their percentage of the European population of Luanda may have been higher than this. Silva Telles estimated that two-thirds of the European population lived in Angola as a result of a judicial sentence (Telles 82).

Table 2: The Population of Luanda, 1850-1930

YEAR	EUROPEANS	AFRICANS	TOTAL
1850	830	11,885	12,715
1887	2,000	12,500	14,500
1898	4,898	10,350	15,248
1923	3,709	19,010	22,719

1930	6,008	39,001	50,588
			(5,557 mestiços)

Sources: For 1850, 1887, and 1889, *Anuario Estatístico* (qtd. in Martins, Vol. 1 95.) For 1923 and 1930, see Amaral pp. 2, 5.

In 1893, the governor of Angola advised Lisbon on the pressing need to construct more houses for *degradados* and their families arriving from Portugal. Luanda, he said, had around 900 *degradados*. Around 304 men and women were already housed in the Fortress of São Miguel (divided into 5 companies), while he lacked room for an additional 257 people, including 114 dependents.<sup>8</sup> Presumably, the governor was well informed as to the total number of *degradados*. If his figure of 900 is correct, they represented 6% of the total population and 18% of the Europeans in Luanda. Only a couple of years later, in 1904 and 1905, there were slightly over 900 new *degradados* arriving annually. Their percentage of the European population could only have been rising (Martins 125).

Convict or *colono* (free state-sponsored immigrant), the life for Europeans in Angola during this period was demanding. The most common diseases in the colony were malaria, smallpox, dysentery, and a long list various fevers (Governo Geral de Angola 19-99). "After illness caused by malaria, without a doubt, alcohol poisoning is the enemy that produces the greatest number of victims, indigenous as well as European, in all of Africa" (Joaquim Vieira 18-19). Alcohol, its production, sale, and consumption were an important aspect for the Portuguese. "Europeans consider alcohol indispensable for living in Africa. Many mix their water with *aguardente* [firewater] or other spirits" (Joaquim Vieira 19).

Both the *Sociedade de Geografia* as well as other smaller societies had quite specific plans as to what types of colonists and how many were needed in the Angolan colony. In the various congresses (1924, 1934) and meetings that took place both at the turn of the century as well as into the 1920s and 1930s, it was clear that *colonos* should be people with farming backgrounds who would emigrate with their families. Sites should be well chosen and all the necessary preparations completed for their arrival.

Actually, the Portuguese crown had followed a long series of experiments in state-sponsored colonization in Angola during the nineteenth century. Colonists from Pernambuco in 1849, Germans in 1857, military colonies in 1859, Boers from South Africa in 1880-1926, and colonists from Madeira in 1884 all made

attempts to form colonies in the Angolan interior. With the exception of the Chibia colony of 1885, they all failed for the same reasons that later colonies would perish: the lack of planning, arable farmland, experienced farmers, demand, and transportation for any crops produced.<sup>9</sup> The Chibia colony was the exception and, interestingly, its success was due to the high demand of its chief product: *aguardente* made from sugar cane. As soon as they were prohibited from making distilled spirits, the colony's fortunes also declined.

Suitable housing was another issue as well:

Houses for *colonos*, places where they will certainly spend more than half their time, should be planned with great care. They should be well situated to take advantage of sunlight and wind. They should be kept clean and should be large enough to be healthy. They should be designed with the needs of tropical hygiene in mind. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the houses in Angola, even those in the capital, are very far from meeting these conditions. (Governo Geral de Angola 9)

#### The *Depósito Geral de Degredados*<sup>10</sup>

The *Depósito* was created by decree on 27 December 1881, which amended the legal code of 1869. One of the ideas behind its creation was to imitate the (then recent) success of the British in providing cheap manpower for its Australian colony. The Portuguese were also students of the French experiments in Guiana and New Caledonia. The *Depósito* would be the central hub of *degrede* and cheap labor, labor that would facilitate the "effective occupation" demanded by the terms of the Treaty of Berlin. The piecemeal and unfocused use of convicts that had been occurring since 1824 would now come to an end; the *Depósito* and its military administration would provide the control and direction (so completely absent) over this rabble. These were some of the basic objectives the state had in mind when it created the *Depósito* and placed it specifically under military command. Unfortunately, neither control nor direction would be forthcoming.

Both the opening and the eventual closing of the *Depósito* can be directly tied to larger events taking place outside the colony, namely the Treaty of Berlin and penal reform movements in Europe. The demise of the *Depósito* resulted not from the failure of the system or because of its cost but from the global depression beginning in 1929-30.

By the end of the nineteenth century, ships making the 24-day voyage from Lisbon to Luanda arrived twice a month. From time to time through-

out the year, the government would send *degradados* from Lisbon in batches (Castel-Branco 116). Once on land, they would be turned over to the guards at the *Depósito* to be registered into the *livro da matrícula* (registration book) maintained by the commander. This was the theory of how the system was supposed to work. Silva Telles states that the majority of convicts were totally unsupervised and unregistered (Telles 81). Faria Blanc Junior (the prison commander in 1915) suggests the same in his recommendations.

The internal organization of the *Depósito* was along military lines, with convicts assigned to one of five squadrons according to ethnicity, gender, and crime. The First and Second Companies were composed of male European convicts, the Third Company of male convicts from the colonies, the Fourth was made up of all female convicts, and the Fifth was for male vagrants from Portugal (*vadios*). Vagrants were the most problematic of all those sent to Angola. Not surprisingly, the state vacillated between sending them to Luanda or saving the expense and keeping them in Portugal. In the period prior to 1915, between one and two hundred were sent each year, but when the 1915 report was published, the commander noted that "vagrants are not sent here anymore" (Junior 24).<sup>11</sup> *Vadios* are also not included in any of the official totals for *degradados*. Legally they were guilty of being idle, not working, rather than of having done something more criminal. Their absence from the figures further compounds any understanding of how many Europeans were sent to labor in Angola. Whatever totals are reflected here then must be viewed as preliminary since the number of *vadios* was significant.

The main *Depósito* was housed in the Fortress of São Miguel in Luanda. The decree that created the *Depósito* called for dependent institutions to be established under the direction of the Luanda *Depósito Geral*. The first such sub-*Depósito* was established in Benguela, which functioned in this capacity until it was closed in 1907. In 1882, 43 people "sent from Portugal" founded the colony of Júlio de Vilhena in the town of Pungo Andongo. In 1883, the Angolan government created the Cacolo-Calondo (Malange) penal colony and a second colony, Esperança, the next year. In 1885, an agricultural penal colony named for Rebelo da Silva was opened in the interior. The last effort to establish these colonies was in 1894 when the military created the penal colony of Mochico to lessen the demand placed on the *depósitos* in Luanda and Benguela. All these colonies ended quickly and in failure for the same reasons as attempts earlier in the century (see above) (Magalhães 36-38). Perhaps the most significant of these was the general dearth of planning and

the complete lack of agricultural knowledge on the parts of the prospective convict colonizer.

The short life of the sub-depository in Benguela aside, it is really Luanda and the Fortress of São Miguel that are at the center of forced colonization in Angola. The regulations for the *Depósito* were periodically updated: 1881, 1883, 1886, and 1907. The *Depósito* was a military base with the intention of providing labor. All convicts, in fact, had to perform some sort of work and all had to wear uniforms, including straw hats with ribbons showing their matriculation numbers (see Photo 3).

### How many *degradados*?

This is the most basic and most problematic question to answer. As mentioned above, the official statistics did not include two critical elements: (1) the number of convicts already present in the colony, and (2) vagrants, political deportees, and those sentenced by military courts.

**Table 3: Total Number of Convicts Entering/Leaving the Depósito Geral**

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	ALREADY PRESENT	LEFT	TOTAL
1883	245		245			
1884	320	35	355			
1885	74	13	91			
1886	69	20	89			
1887	48	17	65			
1888	41	9	50			
1889	89	11	100			
1890	100	10	110			
1891	110	40	150			
1892	165	25	190			
1893	250	40	290			
1894	140	30	170			
1895	149	20	169			
1896	140	12	152			
1897	148	20	168			
1898	128	17	145			
1899	134	17	151	979	83	938
1900	No data	No data	No data	938	37	975

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	ALREADY PRESENT	LEFT	TOTAL
1901	979	161	1140	975	95	880
1902	113	15	128	880	188	820
1903	275	17	292	820	152	960
1904	167	20	187	960	384	763
1905	144	19	163	763	183	743
1906	116	10	126	743	197	672
1907	195	18	213	672	186	699
1908	133	9	142	699	286	555
1909	212	21	233	555	122	666
1910	231	19	250	666	137	779
1911	304	19	323	779	298	804
1912	141	12	153	804	215	742
1913	283	20	303	742	190	855
1914	113	12	125	855	143	837

These figures only include registered *degradados*. They do not include *vadios*.

Sources: 1883-1889: Graph 1 in Telles.

Governo Geral da Província de Angola, *Annuário Estatístico*. 1899.

1901: Governo Geral da Província de Angola, *Annuário Estatístico*. 1901

1902-1914: Junior 64.

In Photo 4, it is possible to appreciate the internal organization of the *Depósito*. At the entrance, after passing though the guard house (noted as number 5 on the original) and past the commander's residence (2), the areas at the front of the prison were reserved for female convicts (3, 4) and dependent children (11). At the opposite end of the prison were the barracks for the four male companies (21, 22, 23, and 24) near the kitchen (20) and garden (*horta*). In between we find the parade grounds (*parada*), barracks for the guards (12, 13), and the various convict workshops (26, 28). Those *degradados* assigned to work in the *Depósito* made a surprising variety of goods. Their sale of these items turned a tidy profit for the *Depósito*. Inmates made shoes, clothing, furniture, locks and keys, tin articles, brooms, washed clothing, and bound books. In the six-year period from 1909 to 1915, these goods and services gave the *Depósito* a net profit of over ninety *contos*.

We also know a bit about the meals served to those working in the *Depósito*. Faria Blanc Junior tells us that he made every effort to serve healthy balanced meals, which (in 1915) daily cost the *Depósito* twenty-six

*centavos* for European convicts, twenty for Africans, and twelve for dependents.

One of the more interesting documents uncovered in Lisbon shows us exactly what these *degradados* were eating in 1931, at the time the *Depósito* was on the verge of closing.

**Table 4: Total Expenses for Foods for the Depósito Geral de Degradados for August 1931.**

PROVIDER	FOODS	PRICE (Escudos?)	CONSUMED Units (kilos?)	TOTAL PRICE
State Bakery	Bread	2.10	10,331	21,695\$10
State Butcher	Beef			
	First quality	5.8	3,330.35	19,316\$03
	Second quality	3.8	273	1,037\$40
José Nascimento Ribeiro	Sugar	1.96	615.06	1,205\$51
	Yellow beans	1	671	671\$00
	Butter beans	.89	1,218	1,084\$02
J. J. Melo	Garlic	3.49	11.4	39\$786
	Paprika	16.85	18.5	311\$725
Manuel do Nascimento	Rice	2	1,907	3,814\$00
	Sausage	13	583	7,579\$00
	Firewood	.09	4116.8	3,705\$12
Beltrão Pena	Salt	0.19	792	150\$48
	Vinegar	1.68	734	1,233\$12
Setas & Irmão	Onions	1.84	719	1,322\$96
	White beans	1.08	607	655\$56
	Tomato paste	3.2	591	1,891\$20
	Pepper (powder)	22	156	343\$20
Céu Rodrigues	Lard	6.5	777	5,050\$5
	Potatoes	1.13	12,232	13,822.16
	Yellow beans	.85	687	583\$95
J. F. Rita	Coffee	2.49	30699	764\$405
	Pasta	4.7	1,683	7,910\$1
Gomes & Irmão	Fresh pork	6.09	598	3,641\$82
	Salted pork	5.92	200	1,184\$00

S. Leal	Salted pork	5.25	594	3,118\$50
Conc. Setas	Chick peas	3.49	721	2,516\$29
	Beans	2.95	207	610\$65
José F. Ribeiro	Olive oil	9.96	856	8,525\$76
	Codfish	8.55	657	5,617\$35

PROVIDER	FOODS	PRICE (Escudos?)	CONSUMED Units (kilos?)	TOTAL PRICE
Various	Fresh greens	.8	15,284	12,227\$20
	Green beans	.8	1,166	932\$80
	Game	2.5	1,395	3,488\$87
	Fresh Greens	.6	220	132\$00
	Fresh fish	2	209	418\$00
	Fresh fish	2.25	206	463\$50
	Fresh fish	2.2	239	525\$80
	Fresh tomato	.5	77	46\$20
	Wine	3.5	131.4	459\$90
	Olives	4.5	14.6	65\$70
Tips paid to suppliers				480\$00
Total				138,640\$67

Of this total, the Ministry of Justice owes 83,968\$60, the Ministry of the Interior owes 45,711\$20; 8,918\$22 for vagrants, 36,792\$98 for civil cases; the Colony of Mozambique owes 2,059\$73; the Colony of Cape Verde owes 6,580\$03; the Colony of Guinea owes 207\$85; and the Colony of São Tomé owes 93\$87.

Expenses for September 1931 were for the same foods from the same suppliers but the overall total was slightly less: 120,013\$86.

Source: Arquivo Histórico Militar, second division, second section, box 161, document 22.

Table 4 provides a general impression of the foodstuffs being consumed by inmates. However, due to the current lack of information, it raises a number of unanswerable questions as well. For example, without knowing the daily expense per inmate in 1931, it is not possible to know how many *dregados* were present in the *Depósito* at the time of these expenses. Without a great deal more financial information regarding the *Depósito's* overall expenses and income, it is hard to appreciate the cost of a month's meals. For example, Faria

Blanc Junior does not include overall income and expenses in his published report. We can see that the *degradados* did appear to have a balanced diet, high in protein (note the amounts of beef and fish). Assuming this list was augmented with fresh fruit and vegetables from the *Depósito's* garden (see Photo 4), it would appear to be a healthy diet. Supplying the *Depósito* with these goods must have been a lucrative series of contracts for the Luanda businesses listed.

### What do they do in the colony?

All convicts were in one of three situations regarding work: licensed (to private parties), working directly for the state or towns, or working in the *Depósito*. In the first two cases, the convict was not fed or paid by the *Depósito*. Those working for the *Depósito* received daily rations and bread as well as two *centavos* daily for their expenses, such as to purchase soap or to pay the barber. All convicts had to pay a percentage of their income into several obligatory funds, including one for repatriation.

The numerous comments made by travelers, government officials, and military commanders suggest that *degradados* were everywhere in the colony and in large numbers in the cities, especially Luanda. After looking at how they were assigned for work in the colony, perhaps it would be more to the point to ask, "What did they not do?" A detailed listing in 1901 shows that the *Depósito* and the colony had 993 *degradados*. They were working in a variety of governmental and civic positions throughout the entire colony. Just to mention a few of the larger examples, fifty-seven were assigned to the troops in Benguela, twenty-four were in the Fortress of São Pedro da Barra (a place of secondary punishment), thirty-three were working for the Luanda telegraph company, thirty-four were employed by the Luanda town council, eleven were working for the police (!), seventeen in the Governor's Palace, twenty-seven were in the armory, and thirty-nine were employed in houses of the military. Of the 993, 127 (almost 13%) were "absent" (Governo Geral da Província de Angola, *Annuário 1901* Table 66).

Few had kind statements to make about the *degradados* sent to Angola. "Almost all are individuals with evil instincts; their habit is to practice crime. For them, *degrado*, far from being a punishment, is a benefit or the realization of a dream. It is not difficult for them to run off into the interior and live with the natives or to find a bit of coastline to make an escape" (Matos 141).

Not all were as unkind in their judgements about *degradados* sent to Angola. One former military commander who had *degradados* working for

him had high praise for them. He stated, "Many times I had *degradados* under my command and, to do them justice, I never had better or more humble workers. The only incorrigible ones were the vagrants" (Magalhães 38).

### Exiting the *Depósito*

Other than completing their sentences or by an untimely death, the only legal method of exiting the *Depósito* and the clutches of the state was by receiving a pardon. Awarding pardons or commuting the time remaining of sentence was a long-established practice of the old regime. Royal weddings and births of children in the royal family were frequently associated with blanket pardons for prisoners awaiting their sentences. This practice was continued after the installation of the Portuguese Republic (1910). Each year on the anniversary of the Republic (October 5), the President would announce the list of those who had been pardoned for their crimes. Inmates in the *Depósito* were well aware of this practice and attempted to bring their plights to the attention of the highest officials in the land. After 1910, annual batches of their petitions for pardon made their way up the chain of command from the director of the prison, to the Governor of Angola, and then to the Ministers of Overseas and of Justice (and presumably to the President) for consideration. Letters requesting pardons were frequent enough that the *Depósito* developed a printed form for the commander's use.

The letter from Francisca Rosa, inmate number 6126 of the Fourth Squadron is typical. Rosa was eighteen when she sent her petition in 1915, having been in the *Depósito* since 1911. She was guilty of the crime of infanticide, having been sentenced (27 August 1910) in her native district of Bragança to six years of prison to be followed by 10 years of *degrede* or to 20 years of *degrede* (only, with no jail time). Later that same year (1910), on 4 November, she received a partial pardon, reducing her twenty-year sentence by one-third. She arrived in Luanda in 1911 and now petitioned the President for a pardon in honor of the fifth anniversary of the Republic. In his accompanying report, the *Depósito's* Commander noted that, other than a minor infraction committed when she first arrived, her behavior had been good and that she "appears to want to reform herself." Her behavior was in sharp contrast to that of another member of the Fourth Company, the twenty-two-year-old Mathilde de Jesus from Castelo Branco. Mathilde had been in the *Depósito* since 1907, having received a similar sentence (and reduction) for the same crime of infanticide. Mathilde, however, had been

punished on three separate occasions in the *Depósito* for insulting guards and for her insolent attitude. The commander noted that “she is not well behaved and shows no signs of repentance.” Petitions such as these from 1915 are both fascinating as well as ultimately disturbing. Young women such as these, uneducated, unmarried, were without the necessary economic and social resources to deal with the birth of an unwanted child. Their lives were, at best, severely marred (if not altogether ruined) as a result.

The sixty-eight letters, which form this batch from 1915, are a particularly rich source (ANTT, MAEJ, folio 729/5). Of these, sixteen are from female convicts and fifty-two are from men. The relatively high percentage of female petitioners (23.5%) is significant. Did they believe the state would be more likely to pardon a female? Was the nature of their crimes (mostly infanticide or murder) somehow more understandable, somehow more pardonable? These sixteen women were guilty of first degree murder (*homicídio voluntário*, six cases), infanticide (five), poisoning (three), theft with murder (one), and simple theft (one). Their ages range from the eighteen-year-old Francisca Rosa (mentioned above) to Antonia Valente, aged 50. On the low end, their sentences were three and a half years for one case of infanticide to twenty-eight years for the same crime or for murder.

The youngest of the male petitioners was Anselmo Pinto da Silva from Chouca, aged seventeen, convicted of theft and sentenced to six years of *degredo* in Africa. The oldest was the sixty-three-year-old Manuel Antonio Estebuinha from Odemira. He was also guilty of theft and had received a sentence of five years and three months of *degredo* to Africa and a fine for three months at ten *centavos* daily. Sentences of years of *degredo* plus a fine were common for the others convicted of theft or murder, presumably to repay the victim or family. Theft and murder are the most typical offences of this lot, with a couple of unintentional homicides (second or third degree murder), assaults, and arsons. The normal sentence for first degree murder was eight years in prison in Portugal, followed by ten to twenty years of *degredo* in Angola. The least severe sentence handed down to a man in this group was four and a half years of *degredo* for theft. Many others combined prison time in Portugal (the time of penitence and reflection), additional years of prison overseas, to be followed by years of labor in Angola (reform and redemption through work).

In many ways these letters are from typical inmates. The average male convict was in his late twenties and was guilty of murder. Women were in relatively small numbers and were normally convicted of murder or infanticide.

Similar (although smaller) lists of petitioners exist for scattered years in the nineteenth century and then seem to pick up during the first years of the Republic (i.e., 1910-1918). It is impossible to know the outcomes of these petitions without seeing the files held by the *Depósito*. Judging from the lists of those granted pardons by the President each October 5, it would appear that those from the *Depósito* in Angola had little luck. Pardons for them were rarely if ever awarded. In spite of this reality, petitions continued to arrive each year.

What did the *degradados* do when they left the *Depósito*? Did they remain in the colony and become the European colonizers envisioned at the beginning of this process? Chapter 6 (articles 52-60) of the Mozambique *Depósito*'s 1905 Regulations is worth quoting at some length here, since it responds directly to the issue of European colonization and state-awarded land:

Those convicts familiar with agriculture who prove to be rehabilitated will be allotted a free plot of land owned by the state. The state will determine which land will be allotted to the convict. Each of these plots of land will be a dependency of the prison.

The plot of land will be cultivated to the best of the ability by the convict or by workers that he will hire.

This concession of land will be done by the governor-general after he has received all the necessary information from the commander of the prison and the local authorities regarding the convict's ability to work and his general behavior. The land awarded under this concession will only be leased to the convict during the period of his sentence. It will only become his after his sentence is completed.

This concession of land will be voided and the land will return to the property of the state in the event that:

1. The *colono* does not begin to cultivate the land within one year of the date of concession,
2. The *colono* begins cultivation but abandons the land,
3. The *colono* leaves the land before ten years have passed.

In the event that the *colono* dies, the land will become the property of his wife and children. If the *colono* does not have a wife or children, it will return to the state.

Those *colonos* who do not have the financial means to begin cultivation of the land will be given farming implements, seed and other necessities by the prison, which will also continue to feed and clothe them for the first year.

1. The items furnished by the prison will be repaid by one third of the harvest. Those convicts who complete their sentences can obtain equal concessions if they prefer to remain in the province [of Mozambique].

During the first five years of the concession, the *colono* will not have to pay any sort of tribute [i.e., taxes] for the land. After that time, they will have to pay the same as all other property owners.

On the other hand, did they return to Portugal? In either case, did they return to their criminal ways, or did they follow the straight and narrow path leading away from the judicial system? Did the presence (or absence) of their families influence this decision? Faria Blanc Junior in his report suggests that many *degradados* did remain in the colony. One of his main suggestions to his superiors was to “make it more difficult for prejudicial individuals to remain in the colony.” He also suggested tightening the supervision of the *degradados* and not allowing them the current one-year grace period to request return passage to Portugal, paid for by the *Depósito*’s repatriation fund (Junior 15-17). The 1915 Commander had few kind words to say about *degradados* and marriage. His view was that nothing good would result from those who brought their wives and children with them from Portugal. The vast majority of these wives, he claimed, were women of dubious moral character who may seek a new life of disgrace. Marriage between convicts was no better; European ex-convicts marrying Angolans “did not result in anything worth mentioning” (Junior 12-14). Better and more complete answers to these questions await further investigation.

#### Was the *Depósito* a success or a failure?

Júlio Ferreira Pinto, himself a *colono*, had a couple of comments about the effectiveness of the *Depósito* in general and *degradado* labor in Angola. Writing in 1926, he stated that the *Depósito* was created in Luanda because of egotism and lack of reflection. He suggested sending *degradados* instead to Cape Verde, since this would lower the transportation costs from Lisbon. Keeping them in the *Depósito* or allowing them to roam the streets of Luanda as vagrants did not have the desired regenerative effects. If the Republic wanted to continue sending them to Angola, he suggested agrarian or industrial colonies in the interior (Pinto 155-158). As we have seen above, the state did attempt a variety of planned colonies in the interior, but

due to a lack of planning or foresight, none were successful. In fact, they were quickly abandoned after only a year or two.

In terms of the *Depósito* as an institution of penal reform, it is clear even from this distance that it failed miserably. It never had sufficient personnel, funding, or the physical space required to achieve its basic duty of housing and administering the pool of *degradados* sent to Luanda. Because of this, *degradados* wandered freely in Luanda with little or no supervision. Some became merchants while others returned to their criminal ways and caused no end of havoc in the capital city. Many others simply disappeared into the interior.

The *Depósito* had a triple mission of removing the offenders from Portuguese society, keeping their corrupting influences far away from Europe, reforming the convicts into honest citizens, and making them useful to the Angolan colony through their labor. Given their relatively large numbers within the European population and the multitude of tasks in which they were engaged in the colony, their labor was significant; the *Depósito* was a success when judged on that aspect alone. However, the *Depósito* created another problem for the colony, as a number of administrators and others at the time mentioned; the presence of convicts and of the *Depósito* itself cast a dark shadow over Angola. Thus, it made *Luanda* and *Angola* synonymous with *penal colony*, retarding large-scale free immigration.

In the decree ending *degrado* to Africa for European convicts, the government concluded that the experiment had been a failure. "The old system [...] failed completely. The shipment of criminals to the overseas provinces [...] was transformed into a dead weight" (Qtd. in Bender 92). Salazar based his decision on cost (Bender 92). For sure, transporting the convicts and providing the expenses required to administer the *Depósito* were expensive. Cost, however, was not a factor when the *Depósito* was first planned. It seems unfair to dismiss it as a failure based on cost alone. In addition, the inmates provided labor and made a variety of goods sold on the market in Luanda. Further study will be needed to determine if the institution actually spent more than it received for its numerous goods and services.

*Degradados* formed upwards of 60% of all white immigrants to Luanda during this period and outnumbered free immigrants until after 1930 (Bender 87n86). There is no question that they had a large impact in Luanda and by extension in the Angolan colony until the closure of the *Depósito*. However, it is also clear that they did not provide the stimulus to free immi-

gration that had been so carefully planned in Lisbon nor did they provide the social impact envisioned in the 1880s.

### What happened to *degrede* as a punishment?

*Degredo* continued in one form or another in the Portuguese legal code until 1954. The end of the *Depósito* came in 1932. European convicts would remain in Portugal in domestic prisons and agricultural colonies, such as the *Colónia Penitenciária* in Alcoentre (near Santarém) and the *Colónia Penal Agrícola António Macieira* in Sintra. By 1933, each of the colonies was slated to have its own prison, where it would house convicts sentenced by its courts. The two smallest colonies of São Tomé and Macau would send their convicts to Angola and Timor, respectively. Angolan convicts (joined by those from São Tomé) would be sent to a smaller facility in Roçadas in southern Angola. Mozambique had its own penal institution: the *Depósito Geral dos Sentenciados* opened in 1894 and housed in the Fortress of São Sebastião on Mozambique Island. Its regulations and objectives mirrored those of its sister prison in Luanda, although it would appear that the numbers of *degradados* sent there never approached the Angolan totals. By 1951, the prison on Mozambique Island was removed from military control and transferred to Lourenço Marques under the judicial system. Eventually, each colony would construct a prison for its own convicts and *degrede* between colonies would end.

The punishment of exile to Africa was replaced by the *Estado Novo* with a prison sentence, which, in the case of political crimes, was still often to be served in Africa. This would lead to the creation of Tarrafal, the infamous prison in Cape Verde, where Salazar's regime would send some of its most vocal and famous critics.<sup>12</sup> The *Depósito Geral de Degradados* and Portugal's experiment with European forced labor in its largest and most promising African colony quickly became historical oddities, curious footnotes in Angolan history. After 1938, the Fortress of São Miguel, where the *Depósito* had functioned, was transformed into a museum, a picture post card site promoted by the Angolan Information and Tourism Board (see Photo 2). Later during the struggle for independence, it would revert to use by the military. Forced colonization using convicts was forgotten after Angola attracted free immigration from Portugal later in the century.

## Conclusion

The forced colonization of Angola in the period from 1880 to 1930 was a bold experiment by the Lisbon authorities, motivated by an increasing population of criminals at home and an international scramble for colonies in Africa. Convict labor held the promise of solving both these dilemmas while providing some of the cheap labor needed to develop the economic potential of Angola and stimulate free European immigration from the homeland. The large numbers of convicts and the state's inability to effectively control them or direct their labor meant that this fifty-year experiment was doomed from its very beginnings.

In many ways, the *Depósito* was a failure. However, if its goal was to set the stage for the future economic development of the colony, looking at the course of Angolan history from 1930-1960, the sacrifices made by inmates of the *Depósito* have yet to be fully understood or appreciated.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The research that made this article possible was conducted in 2002 with a grant awarded by the Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT) and the Luso-American Development Foundation. At that time, I was honored to be invited by the Universidade de Lisboa, Centro de Estudos Africanos, to offer a graduate seminar on "Degredo para Africa Portuguesa no Século XIX." In that seminar, my students and I explored much of the secondary literature and began the archival work that led to this article. Special thanks are due to Professors Isabel de Castro Henriques and João Medina. A second research trip to Lisbon in 2005 was funded by a College of Charleston Faculty Research grant.

<sup>2</sup> For very solid examples of this small but growing literature for the modern period, see Vaz, Relvas, and Pinheiro; Relvas; Vaz; and Bastos.

<sup>3</sup> On Mozambique, see the *Regulamento do Depósito Geral dos Sentenciados da Província de Mozambique*; for *degredo* in early modern times, see Coates, *Convicts*, and Pieroni and Coates.

<sup>4</sup> See the unique work of Maria Eugénia Martins Vieira for examples of *degradados* sent to Angola from 1714-1757. Her work is an examination of one register of *degradados* sent to Luanda during that period. However, it is important to remember that Angola was only one of many such sites in the Empire.

<sup>5</sup> This figure assumes 80 convicted annually from 1200 to 1400 (16,000), 100 annually from 1400-1550 (15,000), 50,000 exiled from 1550-1755, 250 annually from 1755 to 1824 (17,000), 285 annually from 1824-1880 (16,000), plus internal exile to Castro Marim from 1755-1850 (2,400). This very brief summary of *degredo* in Portuguese society cannot do justice to the many facets of the system. I have developed these at some length in *Convicts and Orphans*, and with Geraldo Pieroni on internal exile in *Castro Marim*. For the transition to the use of the first Atlantic colonies as exile sites, see Coates, "Crime and Punishment" 119-140.

<sup>6</sup> The 1869 legal reforms were largely the work of Luís Augusto Rebelo da Silva, the noted nineteenth-century author, historian, philosopher, and legal scholar. Moreira, *O Problema*, 157.

<sup>7</sup> Clarence-Smith is citing J. Monteiro, *Angola and the River Congo* (London, 1968); G. Pery, *Geografia e estatística geral de Portugal e colónias* (Lisbon, 1875) 358; and Hammond,

*Portugal and Africa, 1815-1910, A Study in Uneconomic Imperialism* (Stanford, 1966) 51.

<sup>8</sup> See volume 2 of Martins (appendice documental [unnumbered pages], from *Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino*, Angola, box 871, dated 13 Oct. 1893).

<sup>9</sup> On the earlier congresses, see Barcelar; Ferreira; Giraúl; and Sasportes. For an in-depth discussion of these and more recent attempts by the Portuguese state at colonization (into the 1960s), see Feio (15-21).

<sup>10</sup> Note the rather odd use of the word *depósito* [depot or armory] for the two prisons in Africa. Prisons in Portugal were *penitenciárias* [penitentiaries], not *depósitos*.

<sup>11</sup> See also Relvas 102-03.

<sup>12</sup> On Tarrafal prison, see both Aquino and Tarrafal: *Trabalho colectivo*.

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Photo 1.

"São Paulo da Assumpção de Luanda."

Engraving by Caetano Alberto. In *O Occidente* Vol. 6 (1883) 76.

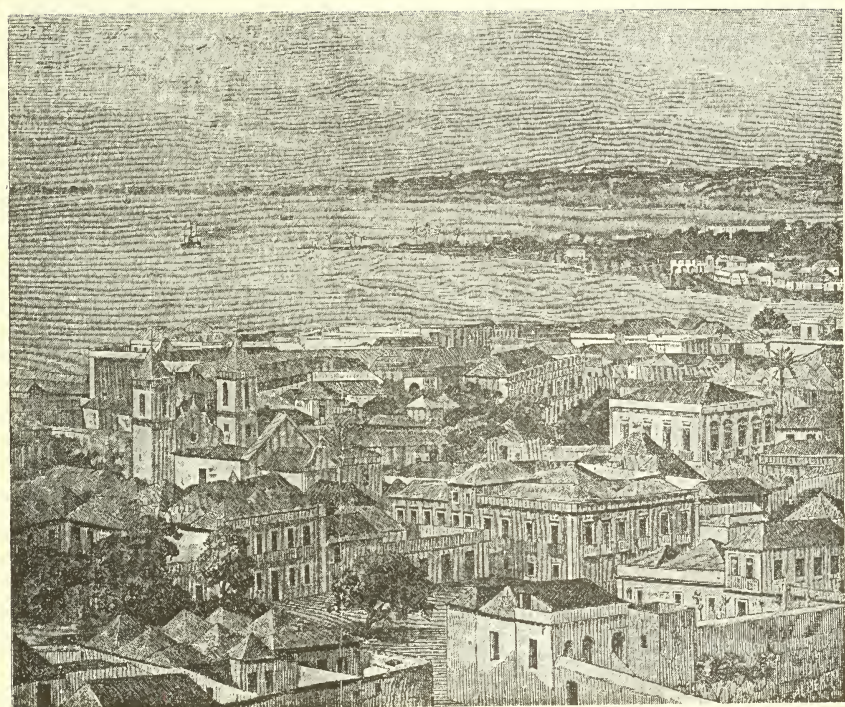


Photo 2.

"The Fortress of São Miguel." Original photo from the Angolan Information and Tourism Board. Published in Nuno Beja Valdez Thomaz dos Santos, *A Fortaleza de S. Miguel* (Luanda: Instituto de Investigação Científica de Angola) 63.



Photo 3.

"Men of the Second Company," in Junior (28).



Photo 4.

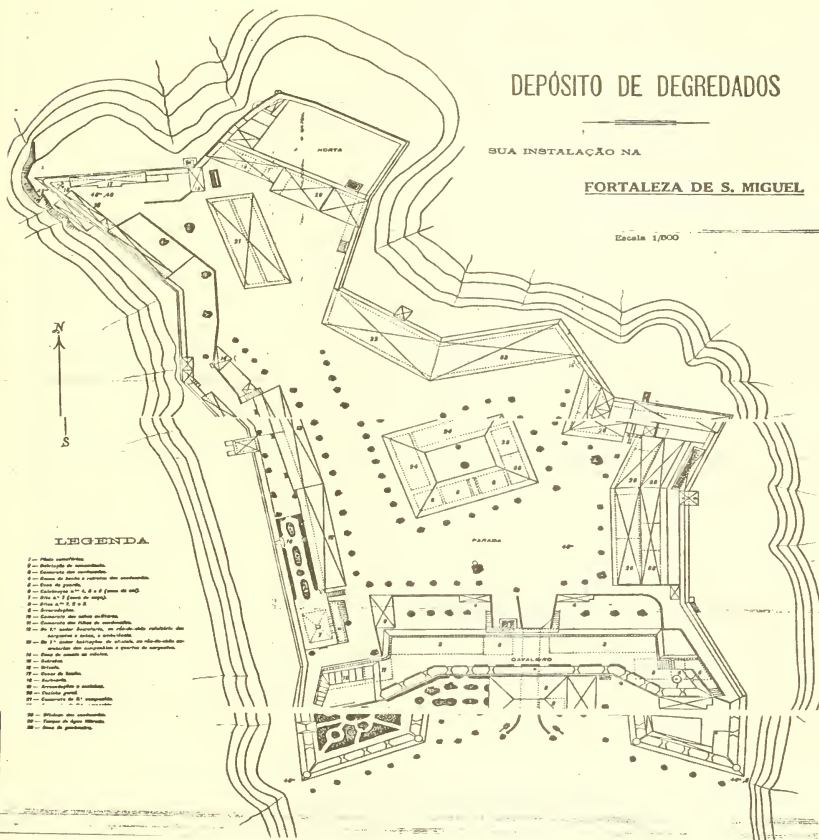
"O Depósito de Degredados," in *Junior* (endpapers).

# DEPÓSITO DE DEGRADADOS

SUA INSTALAÇÃO NA

FORTALEZA DE S. MIGUEL

Escala 1/1000



## LEGENDA

- 1 - Pólo central
- 2 - Pólo de comando
- 3 - Pólo de comando
- 4 - Pólo de comando e comando de artilharia
- 5 - Pólo de comando
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