

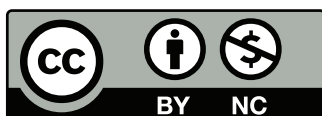
The uncanniness of religious encounters in colonial Angola: A brief cultural history of the awkward emotion (18th and 19th centuries)

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Abstract

Analyses of British militarist colonialism often stress how feelings of horror and revulsion towards an idealized African ‘Other’ were promoted and exploited to justify Victorian era colonial aggression and land grabbing. By focusing on the Portuguese Empire, this article proposes to address the instrumentalization of two other emotions, ‘uncanniness’ and ‘abjection’, arguing that, although they are mired with ambiguity, their discursive use served the same imperial purposes. It demonstrates that, due to a long-standing presence on West African shores, later-stage Portuguese settlers often found traces of their own influence in local cultures. Encounters with these hybrid signs were processed in a historically conditioned manner. The first section of this article focuses on the late Portuguese Enlightenment, probing the origins of the inferiority complex that came to frame these encounters, turning the ‘uncanny’ feelings they might have given rise to into border-reaffirming ‘abject’ reactions. The second section focuses on how the Creole societies of the early nineteenth century dealt with the cultural dynamics they inherited from the Enlightenment. The third section concludes the article by showing how these dynamics were then repurposed during the late-colonial phase of military and settler colonial occupation with the help of new visual technologies.

Keywords: Uncanny colonial encounters, ambiguity and abjection, Portuguese Empire, Creole practices, late Enlightenment



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João Figueiredo is a post-doctoral researcher at the EU funded project “Legal Pluralism in the Portuguese Empire”, PTDC/DIR-OUT/30873/2010

“...the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar.”
(Freud 1955, 200)

“A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A “something” that I do not recognize as a thing...
There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.”
(Kristeva 1982, 2)

In June 1846, Manoel Alves de Castro Francina took advantage of the dry season to visit the Portuguese hinterland settlement of Ambaca (Francina 1867a, 3–15).¹ Francina was an *angolense* colonial administrator, part of the burgeoning Creole community that was firmly established in the capital of Angola, Luanda.² By then, his father was the officer responsible for the cleaning and maintenance of the roads of the Ambaca district (Francina 1867a, 13). While it is unclear what Francina’s own position was at the time of his journey, what we know from other sources is that in 1861 Francina had the title of Assistant Curator of Freed Blacks and that in 1862 he ascended to the prestigious position of Curator of Freed Blacks (*s.n.* 1863, 102, 104–106). In a report he authored the year he travelled to Ambaca, Francina describes how he was tasked with taking convicts and freed enslaved Africans from Luanda to Cazengo, suggesting that he already worked with *libertos* or “liberated negroes” (Francina 1867b, 452–464; Marques 2001, 229–230). Additionally, in *O Jagado de Cassange* (1898), Henrique de Carvalho men-

tions him as the mediator between the Portuguese government and the delegation that the rebellious “Jaga” chief Bumba sent to Luanda in 1863 (Carvalho 1898, 237–238). This fact, together with Francina’s co-authorship of a Kimbundu grammar (Vansina 2005, 4), suggests that his mother might have been of African descent, or at least that he was raised in a bilingual household.³ The report on his voyage from Luanda to Ambaca is full of vivid depictions, and it remains a truly remarkable document because, in it, Francina does not seem to discriminate between African and European beliefs, practices, and world-views. To give an example:

On 28 July, I left the residence at 7 o’clock, accompanied by the chief and some friends, determined to visit a remarkable natural wonder, one that the inhabitants [*naturaes*] of Ambaca call the Puri of Careorombolo... [O]n the next day, at 7 o’clock in the morning, we went...to the Puri, a truly astonishing wonder of nature. At 8:40 o’clock we arrived at the entrance...of a subterranean cave...which we entered, and at its bottom, on the right-hand side... [we found] a lake, and, further ahead, a great dome with white sidewalls, the silt forming a green stripe at the height of a *braça* [2.22 meters], with above it a variety of colors so vibrant that not even the most skilled of painters could ever be able to accomplish. At the centre of the rear wall, a huge stone mound filled the room from floor to ceiling, forming two entrances. Among the many things worth noting there was a hole in the mound, in the shape of a chapel, with what appeared to be a small *stone image* inside it

¹ For more on Ambaca, see Heintze (2004, 229–259) and Vansina (2005).

² For an account of the *angolense* Creole elite, see Barbeitos (2005) and Heintze (2005).

³ The embassy reached Luanda on 26 September 1863. Henrique de Carvalho refers to Francina as an *official maior interino da secretaria geral do governo*, or acting high official of the general secretariat of the government (Carvalho 1898, 237–238).

– a small coarse stone in the figure of, or representing, Saint Anne, which the inhabitants [*moradores*] of the area called Our Lady of the Black Stone. It was surrounded by ex-votos on scraps of paper that local people brought there, and also two *vidrinhos*⁴ [flasks] of oil and wine, the latter causing great amazement in those same people since they could not be [physically] uncorked, a fact that they attributed to superstitious motives.... All around this dome, there was a lot of water infiltration and condensation, water that then froze due to the cold prevailing in the space, forming a variety of exquisite shapes [*representa diversas exquisiteces*]. After we were contented with our observations, or should I say marvelings, we returned to the house of the lieutenant...where we stayed for lunch.” (Francina 1867a, 9)⁵

At first sight, this passage reads like a cliché of colonial adventure fiction (cf. Stott 1989). In *Imperial Leather*, McClintock (1995) has already offered a convincing analysis of the trope of a group of male colonial agents and their entourage entering and defiling an eerie African cave. Francina’s narrative, however, is worth another look, given the way it subverts the commonest use of the motif that McClintock exemplified with a passage from Rider Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885). In Haggard’s novel, British characters

journey through a cave following the trail of an old and incapable Portuguese trader named Jose da Silvestre. After some predictable setbacks, they end up killing Gagool, a “black ‘witch-mother’” personifying what Haggard understood to be the “evil genius of the land”. According to McClintock, Haggard, in having his white characters perform this bloody deed, intended to have them reinstate “Western ‘reason’, technical aggression and the male, militarized possession of the earth” (McClintock 1995, 1–4). In Francina’s case, what the travellers found inside the Puri of Careorombolo was not a clear-cut representation of the colonial female ‘Other’, but an ambiguous signifier that also points towards the ‘Same’. The image of the Our Lady of the Black Stone was uncannily like the objects that Francina and his entourage could have found in any cave-shrine in Portugal. Facing the “coarse stone”, Francina seems to have experienced the kind of uncanniness that, as a sensation, accompanies both the event of boundaries becoming blurred and the return of something long suppressed. Surprisingly, Francina does not, however, react in a violent, border-affirming way. Indeed, a feeling of abjection, in the sense of Kristeva, does not transpire from this colonial narrative.⁶ This can be explained by the fact that Francina’s text, written in 1846 and published in 1867, predates the world-changing events of the 1880s and 1890s (such as the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 and the 1890 British Ultimatum to the Portuguese government). Those events accelerated European imperialism and heralded the beginning of a new era for the Portuguese Colonial Empire, leading to the fast demise of the Creole *angolense* elite of which Francina was part (Corrado 2008; Freudenthal 2001, 135–169). Accordingly, Francina’s nonchalance towards such an obvious display of cultural hybridism

⁴ The Portuguese term *vidrinho* is commonly used to refer to a flask or jar in Brazil but not in Portugal, revealing Francina’s trans-Atlantic frame of reference. For more on the term, and on the significance of flasks filled with wine and oil in Afro-Brazilian anti-witchcraft movements and religious cults, see Maggie (1992).

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the original Portuguese are mine. Sometimes, when the question is of a significant, archaic, or ambiguous expression, square brackets are used to give the original Portuguese term. Similarly, unless otherwise stated, all emphases are in the original, except where used to indicate a Portuguese-language term.

⁶ Kristeva’s (1982, 4) understanding of the ‘abject’ informs the discussion of this emotion throughout this article.

can be explained by his own mixed heritage and the fact that the more virulent forms of pseudo-scientific racism were still alien to him. Nonetheless, the fact that he frames his encounter with the religious image of the Our Lady of the Black Stone as uncanny calls for a closer scrutiny of the phenomenon: although colonial manifestations of this sensation are many, they still lack proper theorizing.

This article argues that descriptions of sensations similar those Francina experienced, often prompting strong sensations of abjection and violent responses, saturate most accounts of 19th-century religious encounters between Portuguese colonists and their African ‘Others’. To establish a plausible genealogy of how this sensation was understood and expressed in the Portuguese Empire, the analysis will be extended as far back in time as the late Portuguese Enlightenment. The first section therefore focuses on the latter era, examining how the self-perceived underdevelopment of the absolutist elites prompted them to adopt foreign epistemological and intellectual standards. After that, the article looks at how this strategy motivated the repression of local systems of knowledge, of both Portuguese and African origin, when the illuminist reforms were implemented in the Angolan colony. That, it will be argued, resulted in the overlooking or suppression of knowledge about African beliefs and rituals, because the possession of such knowledge began to be perceived as a handicap. After this first ‘purge’, the resurfacing of practices and beliefs that were once familiar but had now become undecipherable seemed to become one of the main origins of the sensation of uncanniness examined here. The second section then focuses on the middle decades of the 19th century, a time when liberals began to extend their reformist programme to the African colonies. After that, the article looks at how knowledge about African religious practices and beliefs continued to be actively erased or distorted. During this period,

adding to the arguments mobilized during the Enlightenment period, the deliberate misrepresentation of the uses and customs of the African ‘Other’ was instrumentalized to justify the delivery of *resgatado* [literally, “rescued”] indentured Africans to the coastal hubs of the Angolan colony. The third section focuses on how the impact of this second wave of suppression of local knowledge augmented the consequences of the first wave. Furthermore, it is shown how the cultural legacy of these two periods provided the ideological framework adopted by lithographers and photographers to stage, capture, and represent religious encounters between Europeans and Africans. Finally, the way this latter development in turn led to the depiction of truly uncanny situations is discussed.

Enlightened traumas and inferiority complexes

In the early 1710s, the absolute monarch of Portugal, King John V, took under his auspices a loose group of radical intellectuals that came to be known as the *estrangeirados* [lit. “foreignized”] (Carneiro *et al* 2000; Simon 1983, 2–4).⁷ Subsequently, he accepted to be the patron of the Royal Academy of Portuguese History (founded 1720), sponsoring also the publication of Father Rafael Bluteau’s *Vocabulário Português e Latino* (1712–1720). During this period, the *estrangeirados* were eager to reform what they perceived as the backwards mores, forms of knowledge, and superstitious beliefs of the Portuguese. In the first half of the 18th century, they found a kindred spirit in Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, Marquis of Pombal, a diplomat and statesman who became extremely influential in the aftermath of the Lisbon Earthquake of

⁷ On other comparable processes of adopting “stranger-science” in Portugal in the late 19th century, see Roque (2018).

1755 (Maxwell 1995; Simon 1983, 2–4). An *estrangeirado* himself, Pombal admired the material progress of England and Austria, and followed the example of King John in, among other things, actively promoting the introduction of foreign scientific ideas and institutions into the Portuguese empire and the rooting out of old practices and beliefs. This desire led him to adopt a decisive role in the campaign to expel the Jesuit Order from the country in 1759 and enlist Francisco de Lemos to extirpate scholasticism from the curriculum of the University of Coimbra in 1771 (Maxwell 1995, 98; 2003, 91–107; Paquette 2013, 21).

The reform of the University of Coimbra inspired by the *estrangeirados* provides a good example of a radical epistemological shift going on in Portugal at the time: “new course material was set down, medical instruction was modernized, and the traditional faculties reorganized” (Monteiro 2009, 336; Simon 1983, 4). After being closed for almost a year to complete the reform, the University re-opened in 1772 under the direct supervision of Pombal, featuring several new foreign-teacher hires, mostly from the Italian peninsula. The influx of new professors was enough to ensure major changes in the syllabi, incorporating now new innovations in major fields such as theology and Roman law, natural history, botany, applied sciences, mathematics, as well as maritime and commercial law (Simon 1983, 2–4). The most influential scholar hired for the university was Domenico Vandelli, an energetic Paduan polymath who in 1768 had already helped set up the Royal Natural History Museum, a chemical laboratory, the *Casa do Risco* (a scientific drawing workshop), and the Royal Botanical Garden in Ajuda, western Lisbon (Costa, 2011; Vandelli 2003, 51). The reformist impetus set in motion by the re-opening of the University also resulted in the founding of the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon (1779) and the establishment of the printing press *Casa Literaria do Arco do Cego*

(1799–1801), culminating in the organization of a series of colonial scientific expeditions termed “philosophical journeys”. Overseen by Vandelli, these voyages were preceded by several official appeals to the colonial authorities, demanding collaboration and the dispatchment of scientific specimens and samples to the metropolis (Costa and Leitão 2009, 46–52; Simon 1983, 20).

In his *Scientific Expeditions in the Portuguese Overseas Territories* (1983), Simon describes the late Portuguese Enlightenment as a time when “concepts of religious reform, economic change, educational progress” as well as the literary and artistic novelties of late 18th-century Europe were imported into Portugal, despite “opposition from elements of the nobility and church” (Simon 1983, 1). In general, the circulation of ideas in the final decades of the eighteenth century was intense, “demonstrating the permeability of Portuguese intellectual life to foreign currents” (Paquette 2013, 18). Finally, as Withers (2007, 36) has noted, “In Portugal, Enlightenment was characterized less [than in other European centres] by its nationals working without and more by foreign intellectuals acting within.” Overall, the late Portuguese Enlightenment was characterized by an intense influx of foreign ideas, a trend set in motion during the first decades of the 18th century by the *estrangeirados*. In addition to promoting the re-organization of the University of Coimbra, Pombal also backed a royal reform that altered the foundations of the Portuguese legal system. The new Law of Good Reason of 1769 was the cornerstone of this project. It defined what was to be considered good legal reasoning and valid tradition, banished canonical law from civil courts, and prohibited the recourse to medieval legal glosses and to “pagan” Roman law (*s.n.* 1769). Although the Law firmly established the Portuguese absolutist monarch as the wellspring of all Portuguese law, it was inspired by the practices of the “policed [*i.e.*

polished] Nations of Europe”, also referred to in the law as the “Civilized Nations” (*s.n.* 1769, 1–2). This influence ensured that European standards, even indirectly only, became the true benchmarks used to appraise traditional legal practices and assess their accordance with enlightened ‘Reason’.

Throughout Europe, the Enlightenment was a period when the epistemological foundations of most areas of knowledge went through a profound revision, and in this regard the Portuguese context was not an exception. Nevertheless, as becomes clear from the lives and works of the *estrangeirados*, local peculiarities can be outlined. The main feature in this case consisted of the widespread adoption of foreign scientific knowledge simply because it had its epistemological soundness vouched by a prestigious origin. While in other European countries scholars were trying to “read” Nature (scientism) or History (historicism) as a “book”, Portuguese reformers tended to look at other, “policed Nations” when searching for answers. Probing the institutional and cultural factors that contributed to this attitude is, however, beyond the scope of this article.⁸ Nonetheless, the inferiority complex that played a part in legitimizing this strategy is relevant to our analysis, because it also impacted on the way religious colonial encounters unfolded.

The origins of Portuguese intellectuals’ inferiority complex towards other European “policed” or “civilized” nations can be identified by paying close attention to the criticisms directed at them in the aftermath of the 1755 Lisbon Earthquake. Voltaire’s *Candide, ou l’Optimiste* (1759) includes a humorous description of the repercussions of this event and can help us understand why the *estrangeirados* felt so compelled to resort to other European countries’ systems as their yardstick. In a chapter defiantly entitled “How the Portuguese Made a Superb Auto-de-Fé to Prevent Any Future Earthquakes, and How Candide

Underwent Public Flagellation” Voltaire describes the misadventures of his protagonists in Lisbon. Arriving in the city after the earthquake, they witnessed an inquisitorial auto-da-fé, ending up being punished due their suspicious beliefs and origins, because, according to the narrator, “the sages of that country could think of no means more effectual to preserve the kingdom from utter ruin” than to indulge in such macabre performances (Voltaire 1918, 23–24). To drive his point home, Voltaire then has the narrator explaining that the auto-da-fé was organized because it had been “decided by the University of Coimbra, that the burning of a few people alive by a slow fire, and with great ceremony, is an infallible preventive of earthquakes” (Voltaire 1918, 23–24). As Maxwell (1995, 32) suggests, with this passage Voltaire single-handedly crystallized the image of Portugal as a “land of unreasonable catastrophe mired in irrational superstition.”

Other countries and religious habits, too, are mocked in *Candide*. Yet, the parallelism of this fictional episode with a highly circulated anecdote from Willem Bosman’s *A New and Accurate Account of the Coast of Guinea* (1702) helps explain why Voltaire’s criticism had such an impact on Portuguese self-esteem. According to Bosman, in the year 1697 a Guinean king ordered the mass execution of “all the Hogs in his Kingdom” because one of them had killed a sacred snake (Bosman, quoted in Pietz 1982, 7-8). Pietz (1985, 14) has argued that this account became central to the “general fetish theory of the Enlightenment”. More still, this “theory” about the African ‘mind’ allowed *philosophes* such as Voltaire to set up a strawman alternative to “their” enlightened way of thinking, and then demolish it with odes to ‘Reason’ and with witticisms. In this regard, passages found in Bosman’s account are very close to the satirical tone that permeates *Candide*: “and doubtless the whole [hog] Race had been utterly extirpated, if the [Guinean] King...perhaps mov’d to it by some

⁸ See, instead, Roque (2018).

Lovers of Bacon, had not recall'd his Order" (Bosman, quoted Pietz 1982, 7–8). Because the "general fetish theory" fulfilled this role, Pietz convincingly argues that it provided the *philosophes* with the "constitutive Other" of their "enlightened Self" (Pietz 1985, 14). The similarity of Bosman's object of satire with those of Voltaire's suggests that the latter's critique of the University of Coimbra and Portuguese scholasticism depended on the association of these institutions with a biased image of African religions and political practices. In other words, Voltaire accused the Portuguese of thinking like African "fetishists".

This fuelled the inferiority complex caused by being internationally regarded as underdeveloped and geographically closer to Africa than to the European "policed Nations". Interestingly, it was 17th-century Dutch narratives motivated by old religious and mercantile rivalries that were instrumental here, in being the first to disseminate this conception (Pietz 1988; Sansi-Roca 2007). In this connection, it is important to stress that at the origin of the term 'fetish' there was a Dutch pidgin version (*fetisso*) of the Portuguese term *feitiço* (Pietz 1985, 14; Sansi-Roca 2007). This etymology helps explain the amalgamation of anti-Catholic prejudices with the "enlightened" critiques of African political and religious world-views. It also clarifies why accusations of "fetishism" were so readily directed against the Portuguese. Faced with such charges, the *estrangeirados* then came to the conclusion that they needed to reform their Empire precisely by adopting foreign epistemologies, eradicating all traditions, practices, and knowledge systems that suggested any kind of connection with African "fetishism" (Pietz 1982, 2). This reformist mindset had an enormous impact on the colonies, as every Creole institution, practice, or belief thereby became a possible source of embarrassment and shame (Pietz 1985, 14). With these forms of knowing and being becoming increasingly

repressed and forgotten, the opportunities for them to resurface in an uncanny manner multiplied.

The entry for *feitiço* in Bluteau's *Vocabulario Portuguez e Latino* contains a section that perfectly illustrates how old lore about Africa began to be repressed so that new information or theories could be accommodated:

Feitiço...is derived from *fetiche*, a term given by the peoples of Guinea in Africa to describe the idols that they worship. Each province has a *fetiche*, and each family its own private *fetiche*.... It may have been the first Portuguese travelling through Guinea who, after observing the superstitions of the pagans [*gentios*] there and their *fetiches*, were the first to adopt the term into use [*aportuguezassem*], beginning to call everything that marvels our senses and captivates our will a *feitiço*. (Bluteau 1728, 66)

Bluteau was an *estrangeirado*, a Catholic priest and one of the foremost lusophone thinkers of his time, so his imprecise understanding of the genealogy of *feitiço* must be understood as symptomatic of the attitude of the elites. Revealingly, instead of narrating how the peoples of Guinea ended up being labelled as *fetiche* worshipers ("fetishists") (Pietz 1982, 5), and thus giving an account of the Portuguese origin of the term "fetish", the author inverts the philology of *feitiço*, classifying it as an *estrangeirismo* (a foreign word adopted into the Portuguese language). The inferiority complex previously examined might explain this choice Bluteau made, as either a result of an unconscious slip or a deliberate attempt to obfuscate the historical origins of the terms *feitiço* and *fetiche*. By suppressing the part played by the Portuguese in the genealogy of the concept, Bluteau avoided having to acknowledge, and engage with, the explicit mockery of Dutch travellers like Bosma who

had infamously claimed that:

If it was possible to convert the Negroes to the Christian Religion, the Roman-Catholics would succeed better than we should, because they already agree in several particulars, especially in their ridiculous Ceremonie (Bosma, quoted in Pietz 1985, 39).

By adjusting his linguistic speculation to the “general fetish theory of the Enlightenment”, Bluteau thus managed to hide the fact that the Portuguese had once known much about African religious practices, even if observing them through the biased lenses of Roman Catholicism (Pietz 1985, 14).⁹ According to Sansi, (2008, 125–126), “the *feitiço*, to the Portuguese colonizers, was neither an African phenomenon, nor an archaic or traditional one, but a universal and contemporary one common to the Portuguese and Africans,” which contrasts with the ‘enlightened’ stance that saw in the “fetish” a “differential fact” and not “something in common, which afflicted everyone.” After being accused by their European rivals of thinking like Black Africans, the *estrangeirados* seem to have adopted Bluteau’s revisionist approach, removing from their accounts any traces point to uncomfortable similarities between Portuguese and African world-views. This epistemological break with the past was a process that unfolded in successive waves and remained tentative. Accordingly, it is always possible to find later instances where the intellectual proximity is still described openly or even in a laudatory manner. Where this is the case and continuities with the past are openly acknowledged, a sense of uncanniness appears to inform the descriptions of religious encounters. This attests to the existence of a deep connection be-

⁹ The documents that testify to the existence of this knowledge have, however, come back to inform many modern analyses such as Thornton (2012) and Heywood and Thornton (2007).

tween the Portuguese inferiority complex, the *estrangeirados*’ suppression of evidence, and the triggering of this sense. In another passage from Bluteau’s dictionary entry for *feitiço* we can see how close the Portuguese concept once was to the beliefs and practices that would subsequently be stigmatized as African ‘fetishism’, and how that nevertheless did not cause any existential angst when the connection with Africa was not made explicit:

FEITIÇO. A thing which by itself possesses no quality capable of physical wonders, thus causing them only through the actions of the Devil, in the extent allowed him by the Divine, which [is the power that] enables [these wonders] to work. Thus the lizard that the sorcerer places on the doorframe in a peasant’s house, so as to, for as long as it stays there, prevent both the peasant’s wife and all the farm animals from delivering, is a *feitiço*, because no lizard has the natural ability, when used this way, to produce such effects; instead, it is the Devil that instills it with this malefic virtue, which is then also the reason why natural remedies have no power against these ailments. (Bluteau 1728, 65)

When Bluteau wrote his vocabularies, voyage narratives based on hearsay and hagiographic reports by early missionaries were busy beginning to be dismissed as fiction saturated with fantasy and prejudice. Nevertheless, as the above quote shows, the close connection between the world-views of the illiterate masses of the metropolis and the African subjects of the Portuguese empire was not entirely rejected, either. As a matter of fact, in both contexts were the Devil and sorcery still recognized as possible causes of misfortune. Furthermore, as Bluteau indicates, the project to disavow embarrassing traditions and suppress superstitious beliefs coexisted with the drive to docu-

ment popular manners, habits, and customs.

This tension between the different interests in documenting local traditions, promoting the eradication of superstitions, and concealing Creole practices provided the backdrop of the “philosophical journey” that Joaquim José da Silva undertook into Angola in 1783. As soon as he set foot in Africa, da Silva became enmeshed in local politics. This, to be sure, was also expected of him, since, besides being appointed to lead the expedition as a naturalist, he was also doing that in his capacity as a civil servant. After soon marrying a local-born woman, da Silva established a Creole family and was promoted to the post of *Capitão-Mor* [commander] of the districts of Ambaca and Massangano (Simon 1983, 80, 95–96). Once at Ambaca, the naturalist developed a very successful and “‘humane’ tax collection policy” while becoming a specialist in African medicinal plants (Simon 1983, 95–96). His ability to successfully raise revenue earned him official praise and suggests that he had a deep knowledge of how authority was wielded locally, something that must have also facilitated his botanizing endeavours. Quite soon, the fruits of his scientific labor could also be witness in Lisbon. In a letter dated 1798, the Angolan governor Miguel António de Mello explained to his superiors the great medical benefits of “the wood of *Quiconco*, the bark of *Encaça*, the fruits of *Inariaria* and the root of *Muriassangi*”, recommending their use in Portuguese hospitals (Mello 1933). According to Mello, José da Silva was the one responsible for identifying and shipping to him samples of this promising *materia medica*. By then, the naturalist had become a specialist in local medical lore, a feat that required him to also be well versed in native “superstitions” (Simon 1983, 95). The importance and challenges of this task becomes evident, for instance, from a letter by governor Francisco de Inocêncio Sousa Coutinho, who, when shipping samples back to Lisbon in 1769, stressed

that “Black Africans] having the Art of mixing remedies, with which they cure themselves, [hide this art behind] a thousand fictions, hoping that [what they want to pass for] superstition conceals [this knowledge from prying colonial officers]” (Coutinho 1933, n.p.).

Governor de Mello, for his part, described the “bark of *Encaça*” collected by José da Silva as follows:

ENCAÇA was not known to Linnaeus, and I do not believe that any European has seen the tree before. Its bark has emetic virtues and works as an antidote to certain poisons that abound throughout the known African hinterland. Of this drug the trials must proceed with caution, because if the powder is taken in great doses, it will surely kill. The Negroes use it in their misguided judicial procedures through which they settle their scores in the same fashion we in Europe have for years settled them through duels and the so-called TRIALS BY GOD [*JUIZOS DE DEOS*].” (Mello 1933, n.p.)

This passage contains a subtle metaphor that de Mello either missed or purposefully disregarded. From a Western perspective, the *encaça* bark that he classified as an antidote was in fact a poison used in African anti-witchcraft “poison ordeals”. In the description “certain poisons that abound throughout the known African hinterland”, the expression “certain poisons” refers to what Evans-Pritchard classified unambiguously as “witchcraft” in his *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937). The fact that Mello accepts *encaça* as a drug appears thus to speak of his ignorance about local religious beliefs and their deep entanglements with medical lore and judicial practices. At the same time, it seems unlikely that he really was unaware of these, since he was in close contact with José da Silva who certainly knew that the ‘poison’ that *encaça*

counteracted was purely spiritual in nature. In fact, it was named *feitiço* by local Black Africans, Creoles, and white Portuguese, who used the Portuguese term as readily as its equivalents in local languages (Mello 1933, n.p.). In the latter part of the passage, de Mello seems to indicate that he is aware of this fact, when describing the use of *encaça* in local trials. The governor then concludes his description by comparing the African anti-witchcraft trials to the Portuguese *Juízos de Deus* or *judicium Dei* (Mello 1933, n.p.). This comparison short-circuits the racialized knowledge hierarchies developed and affirmed by the European Enlightenment, coming remarkably close to equating what the *philosophes* considered to be African “fetishism” with European theological beliefs and judicial practices. The feeling of uncanniness and abjection that this proximity might have caused to de Mello suggests another possible explanation for his misclassification of *encaça* as *materia medica*. This apparent slip might reveal, not a lack of full understanding, but a conscious choice to substitute one form of knowledge with another—an epistemic move that is compromised when the governor exemplifies the use of ‘*encaça*’ by comparing African and European judicial systems. Unlike de Mello, however, it seems safe to assume that da Silva was familiar with local anti-witchcraft trials. In fact, as *Capitão-Mor* of Ambaca, he was supposed to seek to stop them from taking place and force locals to abandon their traditional habits by instilling in them “fear of impiety and injustice” (Vasconcellos 1935, n.p.). However, the official directive regarding this duty of his was very ambiguous, and his peers were known to abuse it by acting as judges in witchcraft trials in order to profit from the enslavement of the accused parties (Ferreira 2014; Figueiredo 2011). Making matters worse, the instructions that the governors sent to the *Capitães-Mores* were often vague about the kind of customs they were to attempt to suppress and the kind

they were to document. The same instructions that ordered them to censor local practices also established their obligation to collect “with... curiosity weapons, farming tools, and idols of the locals” and describe “the religion, rites, and laws of the barbarians” (Vasconcellos 1935, n.p.). This inconsistency characterized the tense relationship between central colonial authorities and the imperial agents scattered around the hinterland.¹⁰ The latter were tasked with both the eradication of what these authorities understood as African superstitions and the preservation of African knowledge, while having to immerse themselves in local cultures in order to survive and better prospect for lucrative commodities and business opportunities (Pietz 1982, 3). Once the enslaved persons, commodities, raw materials, or *materia medica* they looked for were detached from their local contexts, however, the Creole cultural spaces that this close interaction gave rise to nevertheless became embarrassing to the governors acting as intermediaries between the hinterland and the metropolitan elites of the empire. This awkwardness they dealt with by pruning out all compromising details from the scientific and administrative records, while hypocritically encouraging the kind of Creole environments they were the first to criticize.

One of the consequences of this duplicity was that newcomers to the colony, ignoring the Creole genealogy of some of the practices they associated with “pure” African “fetishism”, were often at a loss as to why such practices seemed uncannily similar to what they could observe being in use in the metropolis. Catholic sacramental objects and ritual paraphernalia occasioned awkward situations of this kind, often in most unsuspected connections. In his *Historia de Angola* (1792–1799), Corrêa describes a Portuguese-led army tak-

¹⁰ For an account of how Dutch *materia medica* collectors navigated similar situations in the 17th century, see Cook (2005).

ing a village belonging to the *Dembo* chief of the Ambuelas.¹¹ According to him:

While trying to discover hidden supplies, we found a rustic shrine [*lappa*] inside a great boulder in the form of an altar, in which several extravagantly sculptured idols were arranged, along with many others, formed in human shape representing both sexes and built of wood. All these were, however, poorly executed; and next to these gods, which these catholic idolaters [*idolatrias catholicos*] worship, there were many ridiculous objects of sorcery [*fetiçarias ridiculas*] [made according to] their beliefs and customs: such are the religious Congolese, who pride themselves as Christians and subjects of H.R.M.” (Corrêa 1937, 202)

In the same volume, Corrêa (1937, 209) recounts the capture of Quipungo, describing the “Tomb of the *Dembos* from this *Banza* [village].” There, beside an “image of Crucified Christ”, the Portuguese soldiers found an “image of St Francis of Assisi along with an idol in which two bodies are united by their backs, one male other female” (Corrêa 1937, 210). Corrêa not only portrays how “idols” and images of Catholic saints intermingle in the altars of African “Catholic idolaters” (a term the anti-clerical author employs sarcastically); he also stresses the fact that the performances of their worshipers were similar to Catholic Christian “genuflections” (Corrêa 1937, 216–218). This cultural promiscuity caused evident anxiety in Corrêa, whose *Historia de Angola* is rife with descriptions of uncanniness, even where the author vents his feelings of abjection in the form of racist jokes and anti-clerical tirades put forth on paper. Unaware of their historical roots due to their suppression from all official record, Corrêa describes these Creole environments as the space of “untouched”

African “fetishism”, rendering uncanny the racial and cultural boundaries that at the time were elsewhere increasingly reified as natural.

Creole weirdness

As the 19th century progressed, Portuguese officers’ encounters with Creole religious performances kept giving rise to more moments of uncanniness. These often led to abject reactions, drawing the attention of colonial administrators who proceeded to do their best to control and prevent circumstances leading to them. In 1855, the acting governor-general of Angola, José Rodrigues Coelho do Amaral, addressed all the civil and military judges of the colony, ordering them to conceal all details of their interventions in local judicial practices known as “*Mucano* hearings” [*audiências de Mucanos*] (Amaral 1855, 3). Such hearings, as Ferreira has explained in his *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World* (2014, 88–125), began as audiences where enslaved Africans were allowed to contest the fairness of their bondage, but eventually came to include every kind of gentile oral dispute. In urging colonial judges to keep their participation in some of the “embarrassing” practices related to the “*Mucano* hearings” out of all official records, Amaral was not, however, seeking to root them out. What he recognized in these hybrid traditions was that were in fact the cement that secured Portuguese sovereignty on the ground; thus, his intention was not to eradicate them but simply to curtail the potential for “scandal” that their prevalence and any widespread participation in them could produce. This is explicitly confirmed by Francina who, in one of his reports, argues for the need to maintain, and not let decay, the Catholic church of Our Lady of the Conception of Muxima:

¹¹ For more on the *Dembos*, see Santos (2009).

[W]e cannot by any means afford to lose it, not only because it is a Christian temple of worship, but also because the pagans [*gentios*] have a great faith [*crença*] in the miracles of Our Lady of the Conception of Muxima.... It is one of the main factors, perhaps the only one, keeping them at bay, and these hindrances will disappear if the church is allowed to fall into ruin. (Francina 1867b, 455)

The strategic value of the shared beliefs described by Francina explains why lower-ranking colonial officials kept being instructed to collect descriptions of local uses and customs and to instrumentalize this knowledge to the best of their abilities. Nevertheless, since these officials were increasingly oblivious of the Creole origins of the “uses and customs” that they were handling, they often expressed experiencing uncanny feelings. This was so not only because Eurocentric abstractions about “pure” African “fetishism” were nowhere to be found, but also because the hybrid Creole forms that they stumbled upon pointed to their own metropolitan culture and religion. Especially when equipped with the misleading “general fetish theory of the Enlightenment” or its 19th-century positivist versions, these agents proved incapable of disentangling references to Portuguese traditions and Roman Catholic beliefs from their descriptions of African usages and customs (Pietz 1985, 14). This led the officials to unwittingly demonstrate their own backwardness vis-à-vis their European imperial rivals, a situation that caused discomfort and provoked compensatory reactions, aggravated when the uncanny episodes were not grasped in a reflexive or humorous manner.

In 1860, two revealing reports were published in the official publication *Annaes do Conselho Ultramarino*. The first of these was submitted by António Caetano da Costa Diniz with the title (in my English translation) The

Pungo-Andongo: News Given by Different People (Diniz 1867, 135–137). The report includes a description of “the State of Civilization of the Natives [from Pungo-Andongo]” in which Diniz describes four local “gentilic customs”: the *invuje*, the *saclamento*, the *chinguilamento*, and the *udilos* (Diniz 1867, 135–137). Of these, the *saclamento* is stated to be “a way to divine the causes of illnesses, or misfortunes, and causes of ruin”; it is clearly named after the Portuguese *sacramento* (Catholic sacrament). The *udilos*, on the other hand, are described as local *missas* (Catholic masses). The second report was submitted by Vicente José Duarte, the commander of the presidio of the District of Duque de Bragança. Originally authored in 1848, it was entitled (in English translation) “Description of the Village of the Pagans [*Gentios*] of Bondo Caculo Cacange and the Customs of Its Peoples” (Duarte 1867b, 130–131). In this text Vicente Duarte describes a “kind of shrine [*nicho*], in which one can find three small crosses, painted in white, and *tacula* [a red vegetal pigment used in local rituals], horns and bones of different animals, and small clay pots with roots and dry leaves in them; it is the temple of their idols” (Duarte 1867b, 131). After this summary account, Duarte explains that the local “father or surgeon” [*padre ou cirurgião*] is called an *Nganza*, then describes his “church” [*egreja*] and the services performed by a “black woman” whom he defines as the “sexton” [*sacristão*] of the temple (Duarte 1867b, 131). In these narratives, either the Creole nature of the practices under analysis or the Roman Catholic lenses of their observers makes it impossible to disentangle the material and the conceptual dimensions of African and European religious practices.

Nevertheless, this proximity was becoming indigestible. In a later report, Duarte bitterly complains about the fact that the “European” inhabitants of Ambaca were so well versed in local traditions that they could often

take part in “pagan [*gentias*]” religious practices (Duarte 1867a, 125). He, rather fatalistically, terms this transgression of boundaries “the disgrace of the Portuguese nation” [*a fatalidade da nação portuguesa*]:

[S]uffice it to say that it will be difficult to uproot the superstitions of the natives when [European] honourable men, some of them officers, keep in their backyards pots containing soaked roots buried in the soil, so that they can later bathe in those waters, which, they claim, deliver them from sickness and evil spirits. (Duarte 1867a, 125)

Concluding his report, Duarte proposing to fix this “disgrace” in a way that echoes his illuminist predecessors: old habits and beliefs should be ignored until they become obsolete. Meanwhile, by mid-19th century, the condemnation of “pagan” uses and customs acquired new political connotations. On the one hand, in a post-abolitionist context still characterized by forced labour, describing African “superstitions” in a hyperbolic fashion became a way of defending the maintenance of veiled forms of slavery, vouched as an “humanitarian” way of rescuing those enslaved from their own customs (Figueiredo 2011). On the other hand, as settler colonialism and the territorial occupation of the African continent became more of a realistic possibility, what Brantlinger (1985) has defined as the “myth of the Dark Continent” became a staple of imperialist ideology. This myth was often mobilized as an alibi for land-grabbing schemes, the establishment of protectorates, and “humanitarian” conquest. In Duarte’s case, what he seems to have been invested in was the formulation of an apology of rehabilitated forms of forced labour, defending these as desirable because “further afield in the hinterland, they [the Creole *moradores* from Ambaca] tie themselves up in turns and sell one another as slaves due to a simple divi-

nation from one of those supposed divinities” and that even “the Portuguese [submitted] to these uses” (Duarte 1867a, 124–125; 1867b, 130). Confronted with such “barbarism”, Duarte then went on to propose a regulated form of indentured servitude.

Sincere abolitionists also tended to adopt a condemning stance when describing Creole institutions and customs. However, these they criticized from a different perspective. This was owing to their recognition of the role played by inter-cultural intermediary agents in the slave trade. In 1854, António Gil submitted a memoir about African “jurisprudence” to the Academy of Sciences of Lisbon (Gil 1854).¹² In this work, the jurist set about to describe “pure” African systems free from the “nefarious” influence of the Creole coastal societies (Gil 1854, 4–5). Drawing upon his first-hand experience from Angola, António Gil went as far as to defend the usefulness of local anti-witchcraft poison trials where these were not manipulated by Portuguese agents:

While I do not wish to defend the institution [of poison ordeals] as such, what I want to propose is that it nonetheless serves as a terrific insurer of the morality of the blacks. When asked to participate in the ordeal, a refusal to do so acts as a confession revealing the offender. Needless to say, among the blacks, especially the *boçaes* [those ignorant of the ways of the white settlers] of the hinterland, there is vastly more truth and morality than among the whites, even the more civilized ones... From this follows what might sound incredible in Europe, namely that, especially when one is a woman... one can travel across our Western African possessions all the way to

¹² Gil lived in Luanda from 1836 to 1841, where he acted as deputy and attorney of the crown. Although he always publicly condemned slavery, he was involved in a slave-trading scandal in 1841, while he was part of the Angolan Government Council (Stamm 1972, 588).

the farthest reaches of the hinterland, at least in some directions, far more safely, maybe one hundred times more, than one can across the Alentejo¹³ [*i.e.* the South of Portugal]. (Gil 1854, 18–20)

After putting forth this sensational claim, Gil evokes de Mello's argument that the African poison ordeals are similar to the European *juizos de Deus* [trials by God], while lamenting that amongst Portuguese settlers the fear of the *feitiço* was also quite common (Gil 1854, 10–11). According to Gil:

while in Luanda, [I have] often seen people becoming completely terrified because of some crude markings made in front of their doors, or because of a small package made of rags or similar things. These are the *milongos* of the African coast, which are part of the *feitiços* – a term that is always or almost always used offensively, with there being no greater insult in Angola than calling someone a *feiticeiro* [witch]. (Gil 1854, 13–14)

At first glance, Gil's argument seems contradictory. While he praises the "morality" imposed by the fear of poison ordeals, he decries the superstitious belief that "crude markings" on the floor can be magically effective. Nevertheless, he justifies his double standard by arguing that different "civilizations" or cultures find themselves at different evolutionary stages and that practices that are healthy or adequate at one of these might not be so at another one. This view Gil borrowed from Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1725), using it to counter the arguments of those that defended internal slave trade as a way to "rescue" Black Africans from the burden of their own habits, manners,

¹³ Gil argued that poison ordeals procted women from being sexually abused. At the same time, because of their gender, they were far less likely to be accused of the same misdeamours, making travelling in Angola safer than in Portugal.

and customs (Gil 1854, 6–7). By the time Gil wrote his monograph, claims about witchcraft accusations causing great bloodshed in the hinterlands provided the main argument used by the defenders of the "humanitarian rescue" mission (*resgate humanitário*) to defend the enslavement of Africans as a moral imperative. Such claims were so widespread that politicians from both extremes of the political spectrum assumed them to be true, basing their defence of internal slavery accordingly. That was the case also with José Acúrcio das Neves (1766 – 1834), a supporter of absolutism, and Joaquim José Lopes (1797–1852), a fierce liberal (Lima 1846, 200; Neves 1830, 129–131, 202–215). To challenge this dogmatic position, Gil claimed that the system comprising witchcraft accusations, poison ordeals, ritual prohibitions (*quejilias*), and divination rituals such as the *chinguilamentos* (spirit possessions) was a functional one for as long as it remained "pure" and free from external interferences (Gil 1854, 9–11). This was a direct condemnation of Creole practices and beliefs arising from centuries of slaving. Perhaps unintentionally, in openly criticizing this problematic cultural "heritage" Gil triggered uncanny feelings in his readers, with his depiction of the *milongos* echoing Bluteau's dictionary entry on the Portuguese *feitiço* (Bluteau 1728, 65).

Wary of the fact that the African 'milongos' he criticized sounded like Portuguese customs, Gil proposed two ways of rationalizing the uncanniness caused by his statements, perhaps hoping to thereby not alienate his readers. First, he speculates that "fetishism... in the generic sense we give it, must have at some historical point represented a universal state" and that some aspects surviving from this state might remain visible in the underdeveloped provinces of the metropole (Gil 1854, 6–7). Second, he simply repeats Bluteau's argument, suggesting that the Portuguese might have "derived our term *feitiço*" from "this

term *Fetiche*” (Gil 1854, 6–9). These arguments, however, failed to convince anyone. In 1863, António Gil was lampooned by António Joaquim da Silva Abranches, a writer close to de Lima and other apologists of forced labour in the Angolan colony (Abranches 1862, 244–251). In his spoof, a purported comment about oaths in classical antiquity, Abranches channels the uncanniness caused by Gil’s work into abject feelings and then uses these emotions to discredit the latter’s cause. Cynically condemning the vainness with which Portuguese politicians made their solemn oaths, Abranches suggested that:

[Given that in] Paris a proverb goes around according to which Africa begins on the other side of the Pyrenees, and, our thus being Africans and all, and progressing at the present pace, it would not be asking too much that we stole from the blacks, our brothers, the part of their jurisprudence system described by a well-known jurist [Gil] (Abranches 1862, 248–249).

This “part” of the “Africans” jurisprudence system was the anti-witchcraft poison ordeals that Gil had openly praised and that, according to the pro-slavery proponents, was the origin of gruesome carnages in the African hinterland (Lima 1846, 200; Neves 1830, 129–131, 202–215). Emphasizing the sense of uncanniness provoked by some details in Gil’s positive re-evaluation of African customs, Abranches sought to trigger the kind of abject feelings to lead to a violent, limit-reaffirming reaction. In so doing, he instrumentalized these emotions in favour of an anti-abolitionist agenda.

Visualizing late 19th-century encounters

By the end of the 19th century, the tension between the drive to extract and record local knowledge and the need to silence embarrassing details about Creole “uses and customs” continued to give rise to uncanny situations. This dynamic is made explicit in the ministerial order number 514 of 1885, entitled Regulation of the Divisions of the Provincial Councils (*s.n.* 1885, 972–978). In article 30, the Commanders of the divisions are ordered to “avoid the *chinglamentos* [possession cults], *n’gincungi*, *saclamentos* – and all the necromancies and the invocation of *calundus* [ancestor spirits], and the idolatrous cult of the *itéques*, the *n’dua* poison ordeals, as well as the ordeals of *quicalla* and *n’buhungo*” (Figueiredo 2011, 35–36; *s.n.* 1885, 972–978). A couple of paragraphs later, in article 35, the same officials are told to send to the capital city useful “mineral and vegetable samples” along with *materia medica* to be displayed at the museum of the Hospital of Maria Pia (*s.n.* 1885, 972–978). According to article 35, the pharmacological samples and accompanying information were to be collected from Angolan *quimbandas* (*s.n.* 1885, 972–978). These *quimbandas* were the same diviners and anti-witchcraft operators whose “necromancies” they at the same time were to stay away from at all costs. Considering the interest in their activities as revealed by article 35, it seems clear that article 30 simply ordered the Commanders of the divisions to stop publicly taking, or admitting to take, part in the *quimbandas*’ rituals, instead of persecuting the latter for their activities or attempting to suppress them. This in turn suggests that the information sent to Lisbon in accordance with article 35 was bound to feel uncanny, as it was contextualized with details of Creole ceremonies that continued *sub rosa*.

Meanwhile, new pictorial technologies

imposed new challenges, as Portuguese artists had to compose graphic depictions of “uses and customs” that until then had been known to metropolitan audiences only through verbal descriptions or decontextualized museum exhibits. This, furthermore, the artists had to do while aligning their compositions with abstract theories about African “fetishism” and other ideological prejudices about Black Africa and the Creole societies of the Black Atlantic (Brantlinger 1985; Gilroy 1993). This guaranteed that their graphic renderings depicted African uses and customs as uncannily reminiscent of Portuguese practices. Coincidences were bound to occur, not only because these practices and beliefs testified to a long history of cultural contact and Creolization, but also because the strawman version of African “fetishism” that informed them borrowed some of its visual elements from European anti-Catholic critiques. Two examples illustrate how these tendencies played out in lithography and photography.

The first example can be found in the political caricatures of Rafael Bordalo Pinheiro who explored the inferiority complex that Portuguese leaders felt towards other European elites. Adopting common prejudices against African “fetishism” as his comic *leitmotif*, he gave visual expression to the fantasies and biases that had informed anti-African and anti-Black attitudes since the heyday of the “general fetish theory of the Enlightenment” (Pietz 1985, 14). Although Pinheiro seems to have been convinced that his drawings were only based on reports about African uses and customs and the exotic objects gathered in the museum of the Lisbon Geographical Society, the fact remains that anti-Catholic and anti-Portuguese elements often resurfaced in his work. Furthermore, whenever he elected to depict Portuguese politicians as black-faced fetish worshippers, Pinheiro inadvertently echoed the accusations that already Voltaire and the *philosophes* had directed at their en-

lightened predecessors. This meant that, although he tried to channel the abjection that his cartoons caused in a way that could further his own political agenda, he inadvertently conjured uncanny feelings, in great part because his black-faced Portuguese “fetishists” seem to “think” like the quintessentially “Portuguese” characters of his other cartoons.

In a cartoon depicting Portuguese state ministers as black-faced “fetishists”, Bakongo *minkisi* statues (Fromont 2011; MacGaffey 1988; 1990) are explicitly compared to the miracle-working statues known from the Portuguese Catholic lore (Figure 1). Explaining in the subtitle that the lampooned ministers had asked for the ‘miracle’ of an international loan from the United Kingdom, “the Land of the Whites”, Pinheiro elaborates further in his description:

Just as the [Portuguese] believers fill the altars of their favourite saints with arms and legs made out of wax [*ex-votos*], so the silly [*bacocôs*] savages fill with nails their idols [*manipansos*] for every miracle they ask (see the Museum of the [Lisbon] Geographical Society, the idols section). As they now want the miracle of an international loan, they decide to strike another nail in the idol’s belly. (Pinheiro 1897, 4–5)

In the latter part of his description Pinheiro tries to provoke laughter and a feeling of abjection towards his political targets. However, the comparison he creates in its first part is unsettling. If the votive figures found throughout Portugal indeed have the same ontological status as the Bakongo *minkisi*, then the humorous second part does not work as a satirical charge, because the two contexts are too close. The Portuguese Ministers’ thinking like African fetishists is not an exception worthy of derision if the whole country does that, too. To work, racist jokes need a background



Figure 1. “In Silly Land [Bacocolandia] – Topa the Big Idol – The Fetish That Grants Loans from the Land of the Whites” (Pinheiro 1897, 4–5).

of systemic racism based on differential rule and cultural segregation. This suggests that, notwithstanding his provocative intentions, Pinheiro did not take this proximity at face value, pointing to it sarcastically instead. Yet, the historical continuities between the *minkisi* statues, the Creole practices associated with them, and Portuguese Catholic rituals and beliefs must have made his sarcasm feel odd and uncanny.

The second example can be found in the first volume of J. A. da Cunha Moraes’s photographic album *Africa Occidental – Album Photographico e Descritivo* (1885).¹⁴ At

¹⁴ The works of Beatrix Jan the works of Arlindo “[G-SG]”-use of the *meanis common, but very unusualwork*-the use of Yvonne nothe reproduceversion of meaningful, archaic, or ambiguous termsBolds always used as will e (Kristeva 1982, 4)Foran analysis of similaradop-tion during Ricardo also contemporaryithose of John

this early stage, colonial photography relied heavily on re-enactments and the staging of its compositions. This meant that Moraes was tempted to depict “uses and customs” that the “general fetish theory of the Enlightenment” predicted but that were nonetheless nowhere to be found (Pietz 1985, 14). Moraes’ portrayals of African “fetishism” thus come to depend on European ideological constructions inadvertently reproducing in graphical form the same kind of veiled critiques of Catholic mores that resurfaced in Pinheiro’s cartoons. However, the anxiety produced by the uncanny feelings triggered by photographs was aggravated by the widespread notion that this new medium was neutral and capable of transmitting the unmediated truth of events. Luciano Cordeiro, K. Linda Heywood and Thornton For Cunha Moraes’ background and information about early photographical sources in Angola, see Dias (1991).

speaking as one of the founding members of the Lisbon Geographical Society, praised Moraes' photographic albums as the crowning achievement of Portuguese scientific explorations:

What we previously lacked was this: the photographic machine [*machina photographica*] partnering with the hypsometer, the thermometer, and the sextant, making possible an ideal conquest of the Dark Continent.... Words are the quintessential art form, the ubiquitous one.... Drawings transmit, in a materialized form, the immediate impressions of the traveler...but all these [art forms] retain a personal bias...the brain, the eyes, the word, [all] have this one vice: they impose themselves on that which is being reproduced, fusing with it, perforce modifying the object being reproduced.... Substituting these active media...with one that is perfectly passive, one that fixes and represents that which is observed, not as it was seen, but *as it is*: this is the *raison d'être* and the positivist function of the photographic processes. (Cordeiro, quoted in Moraes 1885)

This positivist “article of faith” was published in the introduction to the Volume One of *Africa Occidental*, framing the perception of its readers and accentuating the feelings of uncanniness that might have been produced by Moraes's opting to stage the “worship” of African “fetishes” in a manner reminiscent of Catholic genuflections. In the picture Moraes entitles *Feitiço* we see a black African woman kneeling before two *minkisi* as if in a Catholic tabernacle (Figure 2). According to Moraes:

the group presented to us here consists of two ape-like statues [*monos*] and a black woman kneeling before them in adoration, showing us a *feitiço* or idol

to which the blacks pay homage... [The statues] are whimsically adorned with plumes and a thousand other things... The more adorned they are, the more recognition they deserve and the more veneration they enjoy, as that is an indication of the fact that they have already performed numerous miracles. (Moraes 1885)



Figure 2. *Feitiço* by Moraes (Moraes 1885).

Conclusion

A focus on ‘uncanny’ or ‘abject’ feelings brings a fresh perspective to the history of emotions, colonialism, and religious encounters, suggesting several further lines of inquiry. While feelings of superiority, abhorrence, or disgust can easily be understood as results of white-supremacist education, the occurrence of these two specific emotions is more difficult to account for. Giving rise to violent reactions, they momentarily blur the boundaries between the metropolis and the colony, the newly arrived settlers, and the Creoles, the “black” and the “white” subjects of the empire. Nevertheless, as becomes clear from this article, the blurring of differences that triggered the two emotions was politically harnessed, although not in favour of any progressive agendas, but of stricter and better-defined divisions. António Gil’s attempt to harness the similarities between African and metropolitan “uses and customs” in the service of an abolitionist argument, for instance, immediately backfired, originating humorous spoofs. This indicates that it was more difficult to channel uncanny feelings to produce more empathy for the ‘Other’ than the kind of abject reaction famously depicted by Kristeva (1982, 2). In fact, it is the archival record of violent abject reactions that allows us to gauge the prevalence of these two feelings, as something either depressively lamented or leading to boundary-reaffirming responses. This means that the historical interpretation of emotions as proposed in this article is to a large extent speculative: the access to the interior lives of past authors and their audiences is of necessity a reflexive, uncertain endeavour. Direct testimonies such as the one that can be found in the unpublished journals of the explorer and administrator António Brandão de Mello (1914) remain rare:

One day a black man in San Salvador [M’banza-Kongo]...[in front of whom] I

was mocking an idol [*manipanso*] carved out of wood, asking him what power could such a crude sculpture possibly have, replied to me asking whether we Catholics did not believe in the wooden and stone images of saints that we had in our churches. I was speechless. (Mello 1914, quote in Figueiredo 2009, 79)

Few as they might be, explicit statements like this and the huge body of indirect accounts preserved in the imperial archives warrant a theoretical framework capable of accounting for the occurrence of uncanny and abject feelings in the encounters between Portuguese colonial agents and their African ‘Others’. In this article, a genealogy of situations apparently capable of triggering these emotions is explored, going back to the era of the Enlightenment when, according to Pietz, within the “general fetish theory” a strawman version of African religious practices and beliefs was constructed, one that fused anti-African and anti-Black prejudices with anti-Catholic and anti-Iberian biases (Pietz 1985, 14). In the Portuguese case, these European ideological constructs were uncritically adopted by insecure elites in the aftermath of traumatic events such as the 1755 Earthquake of Lisbon.¹⁵ Ironically, this guaranteed that, despite their best intentions, reformers such as the *estrangeirados* only contributed to the worsening of their own inferiority complexes. Any such irony turned into tragedy, however, when the “enlightened” European constructs in question began to influence Portuguese colonial rule, aggravating the anti-black violence in Angola. Faced with evidence of what they took to be their own inferiority, Portuguese agents became increasingly violent and nihilistic. The tendency culminated in the occupation campaigns of the last decades of the 19th century, when Creole

¹⁵ Also other events could be mentioned, such as the Napoleonic invasions at the beginning of the 19th century and the 1890 British Ultimatum.

elites and cultural spaces, such as those occupied by Francina, were thoroughly repressed. Between the late Portuguese Enlightenment and the early decades of the 20th century, when the experiences of the marginalized Creole groups began to inform proto-nationalist movements on the continent (e.g., Corrado 2008), the proximity of Portuguese and African “uses and customs” played an instrumental role in the extraction of commodities and enslaved persons. During this *longue durée*, this

proximity gave rise to awkward situations that the colonial elites sought to control by calling for the suppression of embarrassing passages from official and other written reports. While this practice only aggravated the uncanniness felt when these silenced habits resurfaced, the solution was nevertheless not as violent as the one adopted when Angola was converted into a white settler colony in the early decades of the 20th century. Then extreme violence became the norm.

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