chapter 4


In May 1961, in the midst of an armed revolt against Portuguese colonialism in the north of Angola, Cassequel's administrators hosted a party for contratados who had finished their contracts. Portuguese capatazes made banners proclaiming the loyalty of the contratados and praising the good working conditions at Cassequel. The caption on the banner of the Bailundo Guia (Image 4.1) reads: “We are all working of our own free will; God watch over us; Viva Cassequel; Viva Boss Alexandrino; Viva Portugal.” To understand this propagandistic show of support by Cassequel’s management for continued Portuguese colonialism, it is necessary to go back a few months: to January–March 1961 and the outburst of the guerrilla war for independence.

Armed resistance to the Estado Novo regime first began in a cotton-growing region of Malange Province known as the Baixa de Cassange. The local population was forced to grow cotton and had to sell their crop at a fixed price. In November–December 1960, cotton producers in this region stopped work and refused to pay taxes. In January 1961, the Portuguese military carried out intimidating maneuvers in the area to send a message to the local population to return to work. In defiance, workers attacked several shops, an administrative post, and a Catholic mission. The Portuguese army used force to end the attacks and to compel people back to work by mid-March. Estimates of those killed in the reprisals ranged from Portuguese sources citing several dozen killed to nationalist sources stating as many as 10,000 killed.1

Because of press censorship and its remote location, the uprising in the Baixa de Cassange did not receive much coverage in the local or international press. The next uprising made international headlines because on January 22, 1961 Henrique Galvão, author of the infamous 1947 report and former colonial administrator in Angola, hijacked the Portuguese cruise ship Santa Maria in the Caribbean. For many weeks, the cruise ship zigzagged across the Atlantic, and many thought Galvão would steer it toward Luanda to jump-start a revolution against Salazar’s Estado Novo. The ship never made it to Luanda, but the possibility of its arrival explained the presence of a contingent of the international press in Luanda on February 4, 1961, when, at dawn about 200 people who were aligned with the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola

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Image 4.1  *Bailundo guia*

SOURCE: SOCIEDADE AGRÍCOLA DO CASSEQUEL COLLECTION, ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO DO BANCO ESPÍRITO SANTO (AHBES), LISBON.