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**FOOD, RECIPES AND COMMODITIES OF EMPIRES:
MOZAMBIQUE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN NETWORK**

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Abstract: This paper discusses the role of memories and history, broadening the debate on the meanings of colonization and migratory processes in the Indian Ocean. Identity processes form a central arena in which food is tied to notions of memory; indeed, people exchange both goods and ideas, engaging in social relations confined not only to the market place, but often extended to more private fields, such as the cuisine. This paper focus on the study of different uses of ‘curry’ recipes and how they were transformed through invention, standardization, or valorization, into national – Mozambican – cuisine. In parallel, and following recent trends proposed by post-colonial studies, it expands the discussion on the role of the Indian Ocean as a place of commercial interaction, discussing, through the lenses of the exchange of food products, how recipes gradually become indigenized.

Introduction

A couple of books published recently on Mozambique’s national cuisine bring back the idea of curry as a national dish with a strong emphasis placed upon ‘spicy food’ and ‘curries’ (Roletta, 2004; Sampaio, 2007).² In the country, as in other African settings, the appearance of national cuisine is part of the process of assembling a national culture, where one witnesses the growing importance of food as a symbol of both an individual’s and a group’s collective sense of identity. This is noticeable with the increasing number of publications, books and websites collecting ethnic, colonial and other recipes proclaimed to be the national cuisine (Cristóvão *et al.*, 2005: 305). As Arjun Appadurai asserts,

¹ I am aware of the complexities - spatial, temporal and conceptual - associated with the definition of the concept of the vast area described as Indian Ocean (Pearson, 2003: 13; Bose, 2006: 5); however, this subject is beyond the scope of this paper.

² Although this question is beyond the focus of this paper, it is worth referring that most people interviewed affirmed that they had learnt how to cook observing and orally, from mothers and grandmothers.

“cookbooks belong to the humble literature of complex civilizations [...]. They reflect the boundaries of edibility [...] and the structure of domestic ideologies” (1988: 3). In Mozambique, the projects of nationhood through modernization, which were predominant in the early revolutionary years after independence, were overtaken in favor of discourses that insisted upon shared cultural roots, however real or fictitious these were or are. This subject is explored in the first part of the paper, while inserting this analysis in the broader context of postcolonial studies.

Catherine Palmer has pointed out that food, along with landscape and the body, are aspects of the modern material world, which have been important to both individual and collective identities. The preparation of food and what is actually eaten may play a part in defining national collective identities, a central element of what Palmer describes as the “three flags of identity” (1998: 183).

The development of a national cuisine involves summoning a variety of dishes into the national discourse. Therefore, the very mentioning of some national dish will subtly flag the nation. In Mozambique, for example, ‘curry’ – a sauce made with shrimp, fish, meat or vegetables – quietly became one of the national dishes. However, the diverse social fabric that constitutes contemporary Mozambique hints towards the multiple and complex culinary history of the country, where various struggles of ethnic, regional, gender and class differentiation have taken place. To assume, as some writers have done (Valente, 1989; Hamilton, 2008), that the cuisine in Mozambique was the result of the encounters with the Portuguese³ hides the diversity and complexities that the dishes and cooking histories can reveal. The second part of this paper explores the relationship between Mozambican cuisine and the Indian Ocean.⁴ Food is an important marker of identity, and is thus used to emphasize difference as well as similarity. The cooking practiced along the coast of northern Mozambique is, indeed, a reflection of the cultural contacts that have taken place along those shores for centuries, producing a cuisine that is a hybrid of African, Asian and European influences. At the same time one needs to be aware that the emphasis on national cuisine from an ahistorical perspective veils a political point erasing present cultural

³ Like in Angola, Cape-Verde, Goa, Macau, East Timor, Brazil, St. Tome and Principe or Guinea-Bissau.

⁴ Until early 19th century, today’s Indian Ocean was also known in European charts as ‘Sea of the Indes’ and ‘Eastern Ocean’.

differences, a message that obscures the fact that these differences have been used to the advantage of the colonial regime.

This paper conjugates oral accounts and written sources. The primary sources at its origin are my first-hand observations, as well as oral accounts of people, mostly obtained in Mozambique Island between 2001 and 2007.⁵ Secondary sources are literature dealing with food, memory and history, as well as websites dealing on food and tourism. The primary sources, especially the oral accounts by members of older generations, reveal an overpowering emotional effect, reflecting practices and politics of voice. In contrast, the internet reflects and circulates images of social landscapes that are building blocks of what one could call imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe (Appadurai, 1996: 33).

1. Tastes Created by the Empire?

Feeding others and sharing foods are almost universal ways to show solidarity and create good will. Receiving food with respect and enjoyment fosters relationships and creates a pathway to sharing substance and meanings.

The Mozambican case should be seen in light of a relatively small yet growing body of literature that explores the links between senses, the body, the consumption of food and memory (Bataille & Cousin, 1996; Caplan, 1997; Sutton, 2001; Lien & Nerlich, 2004; Hamilton, 2008). Accepting that the past is experienced and settles within our bodies, the analysis of bodily experiences helps decode social pasts, opening a window to explore the historical consciousness and intersubjectivity of contemporary Mozambique.

D. Fátima, an older woman inhabiting Mozambique Island, when asked about the way she would cook curry, spiced up the recipe with a detailed description of the social connections intertwined in the ingredients used to cook the dish:

I've been eating curry since I remember, and I started preparing it, helping my mother, as the other girls used to do, since we were quite young...[...]

⁵ The interviews were conducted mainly in Portuguese and Emakhuwa, with the support, whenever needed, of local translators.

The way I cook it, it is indeed, a recipe of my family. My mother and my grandmother are from here, from Mozambique Island. In this region curry is made in a different way. Here, in the Island, curry is just a good sauce, and in my family we cook it with fish fresh from the sea. But you can also add dry shrimp or crab. The fish has to be cleaned first. If you are having a family meal, then it is a party. You have to have a good size fish. The preparation varies, depending on the person who cooks and the regional variations. Some cooks stack the ingredients in layers. Others cook first a *refogado* made with onions and tomatoes sautéed in vegetable oil, garlic and *piri-piri*.⁶ The cook then adds the other ingredients slowly. In either case the coconut milk is added on top, slowly, as the curry is cooking... You know, in the south people would rather use peanut milk instead of coconut. It is the milk that helps produce the sauce, you see? The dish has to cook slowly because it has to let the flavors penetrate the fish flesh.

If you cook it this way it is because we have a holiday lunch. But you can prepare the sauce with cassava leaves, with vegetable, if it is just for an ordinary meal... In my family we cook it almost always on Sundays. It is part of the big Sunday meal we have, when all the family gets together.

Now you can eat different meals in restaurants and people call it curry. But the curry they mean is the one you cook with curry powder, and it is mainly cooked with shrimp or crab, as I explained. In colonial times, you could rarely find a restaurant serving this curry with fish, with vegetables... Curry was the recipe that the Goans that lived here used to prepare. Maybe long ago we used to cook the same way... I don't know. But the Goans wanted to be seen as Portuguese, as white people. Because they interacted mostly with Portuguese whites, I mean, they used to visit each other with some frequency, I think that what people refer to as 'curry' when they look in cuisine books or ask about curry when they go to a restaurant, they refer to that dish they remember from those old days, from colonial times... That is the memory they have about curry!

Even those very few whites who occasionally ate fish curry with us were always careful... they were afraid of strange foods and of *piri-piri*. And we eat the curry with our hands, and it leaves your hands greasy. And you have to know how to eat. To eat in public with your hands was a symbol of being black, of being indigenous. To indulge yourself in such dishes as a fish curry, eating as we did was akin to lowering the white people to the level of the indigenous. The Portuguese would generally only eat and be invited to the houses of the Goans. Today you can eat many different forms of curry, even in the most up-scale hotels. These days at important parties, even the most elegant, it is very 'in' to have a buffet table with 'typical dishes'. There are always two or more kinds of curry there.

Nowadays, while images of empire surface and resurface in the public domain, studies on the colonial situation have materialized over the last decades as a force of

⁶ *Piri-piri* is the name used in Mozambique (and latter on, exported to Portugal, South Africa, etc.) to describe the African bird's-eye or African red devil chili. In Portugal, the term is used as a synonym of most hot sauces. As suggested by some of the interviewees, the origins of the name *piri-piri* can be identified in Gujarati, where the term *piri-piri* is used to refer to very yellow, in reference to the color of the sauce, made with chilies and turmeric, used in Daman and Diu.

cultural critique, political commentary, and as a domain of new expert knowledge. This entire field has positioned itself as a counterbalance to the distinct eruptions of colonial nostalgia over the last fifty years in personal memoirs and biographies, tropical chic couture, and a film industry that encourages “even politically progressive [Western] audiences” to enjoy “the elegance of manners governing relations of dominance and subordination between the races” (Rosaldo, 1985: 68).

From the vantage point of the postcolonial, the remembrance of past colonial relations of power has emerged as fundamental to a range of postcolonial intellectual and political agendas that make the recording, rewriting and eliciting of colonial memories so pertinent and charged. The challenge thus remains on the possibility of discussing the colonial situation and its memories and impacts, as problematic sites of query.

Why bring food and memory into dialogue with postcolonialism? These are some of the most dynamic areas in Social Sciences and the Humanities, yet their relationship continues to reflect a certain reciprocal indifference or mistrust. Specifically in terms of the Western Indian Ocean,⁷ Mozambique is still a rather understudied subject. The self-enclosed national research on the specific characteristics of Mozambique’s postcolonial situation reflects the absence of a broader analysis of the colonial contacts that were prompted by the circuits of the Indian Ocean. This paper engages in the personal memoirs (including recipes) and public records of the ‘others’, including the Europeans, and particularly the Portuguese, as well as the Indians – including the Goans - who were also part of the social mosaic that was colonial Mozambique, and its representation in the present.

Questions of memory have played an increasingly prominent role in how scholars analyzing colonialism understand the relationship between the facts captured by the colonial archive and ethnographically obtained historical knowledge, between archival production and the politics of its consumption, between a particular set of memory aids - manuscripts, recipes, metaphors, objects, among many others - and how this archival knowledge is remembered and constantly (re)appropriated by formerly colonized populations for their needs today. In this text memory is seen as a repository of alternative

⁷ Here I closely follow Alpers (2009: 25), for whom the ‘Western Indian Ocean’ region includes “the coast of eastern Africa as far south as Delagoa Bay, the Red Sea, southern Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and the western coast of the Indian sub-continent”.

histories and subaltern truths awaiting an audience to counter official versions, for they broaden the range of actors and accounts that construct Mozambicanness.

From a very early date, the Indian Ocean witnesses an intense transit of sailors, traders, religious men, and other migrants moving in search of goods, new lands, or the great unknown. Their movements were shaped by numerous factors, both geographic and social in origin. Over the centuries, these exchanges transformed the Indian Ocean into an interconnected space. Trade, especially long-distance trade, was a key element in this process.⁸ As Michael Pearson suggests (2003: 5), the study of the history of trade networks, together with political and religious factors, opens up new windows that allow for a better understanding of the reasons that led to the emergence of particular societies, as well as the larger area to which they were linked – the Indian Ocean. Trade implies not only an exchange of goods, but also an exchange of knowledge, beliefs, and values, foodstuffs and recipes.

The role of the spice trade in early modernity has been object of a large body of academic work, revealing the crucial role of spices – and their deep penetration - into the markets of the Indian Ocean Rim, even if descriptive information is patchy and statistics hardly exist, as it does especially when it comes to Eastern Africa (Pearson, 1998). One can grasp some of the present complexities in post-colonial Mozambique by exploring the particularities of the network of relations that connected regions as distant as Gujarat in Northwestern India to Mozambique in Eastern Africa with the emergence of modern Portuguese colonization in the later 19th century. Although places such as Gujarat and Goa, have been regarded as central in the commercial systems of the Indic area, that of East Africa – in a broad sense - has been more marginal in general accounts of the history of the Indian Ocean. In Mozambique, as elsewhere, food embodies history, geography, cultural contacts, class, gender, and identity. Looking through the lenses of food histories, and especially the multiple uses of ‘curry’ in identity processes, I will seek to exemplify the complexity of the colonial relationships in Mozambique, and their weight in contemporary, postcolonial context.

⁸ On this subject, see for example Chaudhuri, 1985; McPherson, 1998; Das Gupta and Pearson, 1999, Bose, 2006, and Alpers, 2009.

Vasco da Gama's passage through Mozambique came to symbolize the rooting of colonial relationships in Eastern Africa.⁹ The subsequent colonial projects of the Portuguese sought to recast the Indian Ocean in terms of the Western imagination—constructing 'East Africa' and 'Southern Africa' as we know it today — and were part of a re-ordering of the world on European terms. Initially, the presence of Eastern Africa in Portugal was contained in and spread through exotic commodities, elaborate legends and the embellished firsthand experiences of a few hardy travelers (Santos & Meneses, 2006). However, this part of the imperial project took a new strength in Mozambique during late 19th century after the Berlin Conference. Portuguese East Africa, as Mozambique became known up to the 1920s, was the geographical expression and a cultural formation initiated as part of the imperial process by which Europe sutured the globe, and thus established its distinctive identity in relation to rest of the world. This process, underwritten by imperial ideology, involved a radical shift to the idea of Europe as synonymous with White Men, introducing various categories of 'non-Europeanness' and the embryonic discourses of 'race' to govern and conceptualize human diversity (Wolf, 1982; Todorov, 1993).

The entry of South-Eastern Africa into the European imagination was therefore not an event like the appropriation of the Western hemisphere, in which an unknown landmass and its inhabitants were consumed by Europe. Many of the traits considered to be specifically South Asian were constituted by networks of trade, where the Portuguese were not breaking new ground. The spices that were brought by the Portuguese from multiple locations later became part of a certain global cuisine that is now perhaps too un-problematically defined as Indian, and from where the 'curry' of Mozambique has its roots. Nevertheless, at a time when Africa was being constructed as part of the East where spices originated, the same territory was being portrayed in a manner that embodied a sense of wickedness, full of risks and diseases that affected the white man. Di Celerina, an Italian physician described these risks as

[the] sudden impact of the rain on one's body, suddenly followed by an extreme heat, a blazing sun; the sadness and the melancholy of the spirit sometimes resulting from the lack of means essential to survival; the unpleasant and often filthy

⁹ The Portuguese began settling at the Island of Mozambique and the adjacent *terras firmes* [firm lands] in 1508.

accommodation, bringing about loneliness that depresses the spirit and waste the body's vigor [...]; the bad food, indigested by nature, full up with stimulant spices [...]; the overuse of Venus and Bacchus pleasures, etc. (1846: 49).

The Portuguese came to represent their integration¹⁰ in a broader process of trade and political and cultural exchanges through their continuous voyages along the shores of the Indian Ocean, and hence placed the region on European horizons. However, this integration has been mainly observed and transmitted in the West through the eyes of the European travelers, military traders, religious entities, among others, passing on the power structures these relations entailed.

Colonial domestic relations were invoked through recollections of taste and smell of unfamiliar foods, the sound of partially understood conversations and commands, through reference to sweat, soaps, and other smells. Sentiments lay neither outside of nor behind odor, taste or tactile memories, but embedded within them. This is particularly evident in a letter wrote by a Portuguese woman, D. Inácia, arrived to the Island late in the 19th Century.

I have been here in Mozambique since June 25th [1871] and have finally settled into our house [...]. The house is in need of some repairing. It is lively and well ventilated, but it is still messy right now. The house only has three large rooms, two bedrooms, one of which is for the blacks, a pantry, something that looks like a dining room, but is more like a large corridor, with five doors and a window, and a kitchen that is located outside, through the veranda. I have not been there lately because it is sunny and windy. I perspire a lot and don't want to risk catching a cold so I call the black to the dining room and I give him orders. For now I only buy for the day, like my husband did before, because I have not furnished the pantry yet, and the way things are here... [...] I have a couple of servants. One of my husband's old servants is now the cook. He is all right. He is a young black, a good servant, but a day ago he was very drunk. It is his defect, and he also steals a couple of coins if he can... but I am still content with him, because he is very respectful. He follows my orders since he knows he is not a cook. I haven't taught him how to cook rice, we basically heat rice cooked in broth. [...]

The bread here is very expensive and very bad, but it is edible when toasted. I also bought a box of two kilos of butter. It isn't bad. It is French. When we arrived, the meat cost 40 *reis* per pound, but now it rose to 80 *reis*. There is chicken, plenty of fish and inexpensive, eggs... The fruit is cheap, but the milk is more expensive than in Portugal. The price of tea is similar to the price in Porto. The coffee, if we don't buy it right after it is harvested, since the blacks grow it in the continent, becomes

¹⁰ With all the problems that this concept rises.

very expensive. Macaroni and sardines can also be bought here, as well as ham, bacon, etc. The oil I use for cooking is made of coconut; a small amount is enough for cooking and for lighting the black's lantern. The olive oil I bought – a bottle, very expensive – is greenish ... and it is only to be consumed with cooked fish, to season the salad and the *açordas*¹¹ we cook for lunch. The rice is cheap and abundant so we use a lot. It is the bread of the blacks, and they don't want anything else. They just eat it boiled in water and with salt, but it is still cheaper than bread (Fernandes, 2004: 252-255).

Memories of servants eating their food in the back quarters while the Portuguese ate 'white' food in the dining room were, for many, signature scenes of cultural divides within the home.

Until the very end of the 19th century, when the capital of Mozambique was transferred to Lourenço Marques in the extreme south of the colony,¹² references to the greater Indian Ocean gave emphasis to Goa. For a long time it was seen as the 'capital' of the Eastern Portuguese colonial empire - the Portuguese Viceroy of India thus encouraged the migration of people from the region to East African shores. This connection is drawn from the fact that Mozambique received official instructions directly from the Portuguese Vice-Kingdom of India, in Goa, for almost two centuries. When this dependence formally ended in 1752,¹³ the commercial ties remained very important,¹⁴ with Indian traders maintaining a ubiquitous presence in the region (Ribeiro, 1930; Alpers, 1976; Antunes, 1995; Pereira Leite, 2001; Santos & Meneses, 2006).

Regarding Mozambique, these excerpts indicate that Portuguese colonialism has to be understood through its effects and characteristics, for the Portuguese complex presence in the country is revealed among different cultural and social groupings. This colonial project entailed the production of an otherness that was represented as radically different, hence incorrigibly inferior. As a system that allowed to maintain unequal relations of economic and political power, the specifics of Portuguese colonialism included the presence of

¹¹ A kind of soup, traditionally made in Portugal with dry bread.

¹² Nowadays, Maputo.

¹³ With the capital of the colony of Mozambique being established in the Island. In the late 1750s the Indian community in Mozambique Island – mostly composed of *vania* from Gujarati – numbered more than 200 individuals, thus apparently outnumbering the European Portuguese inhabitants. Veja-se a *Proposta do Senado da Câmara a David Marques Pereira*, Moçambique, May 9th 1758, Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Caixa 6.

¹⁴ Indian traders from Daman and Diu in Gujarat were permitted to settle in Portuguese territories of Mozambique from that time on.

multiple layers of subordination and power relations among multiple groups: blacks, black Muslims, Indians, local Moors, etc. (Santos & Meneses, 2006).

Color became the artifact of the Portuguese colonial administration introduced towards the end of the late 19th Century to define hierarchies, proximities and differences. Since late 19th Century, the pejorative expression ‘*monhé*’¹⁵ included different representations:¹⁶ the Hindu banyans,¹⁷ mainly originating from Gujarati, in India, as well as the moors¹⁸ or Muslims. The term Muslim or Moor included the diverse groups integrating the commercial and cultural circuit of the Indian Ocean, together with people from the British Raj, from the various sultanates in the Gulf area, as well as the so called Africanized Muslims.¹⁹



1889 – “Banyan trafficking in the interior [of Mozambique]”,
Mozambique National Archives

¹⁵ *Monhé* (also, *myinhi*, *mwénè*): expression of Bantu origin used along the coast to refer to the lords of the region. Later on, under the influence of the modern Portuguese colonial administration, with their racial prejudice towards non-European populations, the word became used to refer to Indians in general.

¹⁶ For example, Almeida e Cunha described the Europeans’ category as including the Portuguese present in Mozambique for the purpose of administration of the colony, their families, as well as some foreign traders (French, British, German and Swiss), employed in commercial companies. The author divided the Indians into: *Banyans* (from Portuguese India), *Bathiás* (from Cutch and British India), Moors and Heathens, adding that the indigenous African population included mulattos, Swahili people, Muslims, among others (1885: 36).

¹⁷ The terms derived from Sanskrit, where the word *banij* means trade, and *vanij*, trader. On the community of traders originating from the ‘Portuguese India’, see Alberto & Toscano, 1942; Lobato, 1967 and Alpers, 1976, 2009.

¹⁸ Moors is the designation the Portuguese used to refer to the Muslim present in northern Mozambique.

¹⁹ In most cases it is a ethnic reference to certain *Makhuwa* groups from the coastal area in northern Mozambique, as a means of differentiating them from the Swahili group also established along the shores; these communities were profoundly involved in the trade activities in the Indian ocean (McPherson, 1998; Pearson, 1998).

Going back to literature produced at the time when Portugal was actively seeking to construct Mozambique as a modern colonial domain, one observes there was a time when whites were regarded in African societies not as bearers of unprecedented power but as ‘familiar’ strangers.²⁰ These white newcomers would eat and share the hospitality of local elites. Describing the relationships established with an important local trader and *prazeiro*²¹ – Romão de Jesus Maria –, Gravicho de Lacerda, a colonial administrator wrote:

Unmistakable figure, tall and slender like a palm tree, thin like a herring, he was the son of an *afrikander*²² and an Indian woman from Goa, this latter of pure race, but descendent of merchants called *monhês* who have migrated for centuries, from India to our Eastern Coast.

His father, an old slave and land owner had sent him to India to be educated. He had returned some time ago a little bit more polished, with the varnish of civilization. [...] His house, like most of the houses in that village, had a huge backyard, where orange trees, tangerine trees and some palm trees grew. The kitchen, according to local way of life, was an isolated block. On the other side of the main house there was another building for the main servants. [...] Here, the tradition calls for rich and diverse repasts. Lunches would melt into dinner, and these, sometimes, into a late supper. This was not only for the pleasure of the food – since the dishes were the best one could think of – but also for the practice and a certain instinct of defense, mainly due to the dominant idea shared by many that the meals had to be abundant, strong and diverse so people would have better resistance to fevers that mostly fell upon people arriving from the Kingdom [metropolis].

Our first meal at his house was unforgettable because we felt the palate of our mouths on fire for days, since the delicacies were highly spiced.

Curry, until then completely unknown to us, is, so to speak, an indispensable dish in all meals in Africa. It is particularly potent; the ingredients that complement it are even spicier. This probably explains why we never could get used to that delicacy, which is very much appreciated by everybody. One hardly finds someone who dislikes it. It finds its way into everybody’s house, from the poorest to the richest. For the poor, quite often is the only food they consume, whereas the wealthier present it as a complementary dish or prepare it in a very exquisite way. It depends on the complements the curry is served with, as well as on the ingredients used. It is like the stew made with tripe in Porto. In affluent houses it is prepared with good beans, pork meat, *chorizo*, chicken, rabbit, among other ingredients in addition to tripe. In the poorer houses, on the opposite, one only adds beans or chickpeas. Curry must have been introduced to Eastern Africa by the Indians that since long ago have migrated to

²⁰ Only later would the strangers be transformed into estrangers.

²¹ Portuguese-leased crown estates. While *prazos* were originally developed to be held by Portuguese over three generations, through intermarriage they became African Portuguese or African Indian owned land properties defended by large African slave armies known as *chikunda* (Isaacman, 1972; Newitt, 1995).

²² Word used to refer to white farmers in Southern Africa, descendants of Calvinist Dutch (or sometimes French Calvinist, German or Belgian), speaking Afrikaans.

those coastal regions. A proof of this is the fact that the curry with rice is not as widespread in the West [Africa]. Since we spoke about curry, one cannot avoid presenting the recipe. Usually it is cooked with chicken, shrimp, meat or fish, or even with vegetables. Rice is cooked separate from the curry. The curry stew is cooked in a pan where one adds, besides the meat or fish, coconut milk, which is the main ingredient. This milk is produced grating the coconut pulp with an iron instrument. This instrument, called *Raro*, is part of the kitchenware in all houses [...]. When the coconut is grated, one adds very hot water, squeezing the milk by hand. After that the white, milk-like liquid is strained using a strainer made from a local fibrous plant, called *essupa*; because *essupa* fibers are very tight, it retains all the small particles of coconut. [...].

One then adds *piri-piri* (a small chili, very hot, cut into tiny pieces) to the pan, and well known seasoning from India made of saffron, cumin, cilantro seeds, clover, etc. The cook has to stir the stew slowly. In order to taste it, he drops a small amount of the sauce on the palm of his hand so he does not have to put the spoon to his mouth as we do in Portugal, which is cleverer and cleaner.

The curry is never eaten by itself. It is followed by other dishes, truly stimulant, and to be complete, it has to have ‘all its killers’, as people say here.

Since some of you may be curious, and have your mouths dripping wet from these descriptions, I can describe these components.

Mango or Lemon Achar: it is made with pieces of these fruits, preserved in salt, with lots of *piri-piri* and lemon juice. In order to last for a long time, it has to be exposed to the direct sunlight for a couple of days. *Paparim*: it is a kind of fritter, like we prepare for Christmas, made with maize from a local bean (*seroco* bean), with the difference that instead of sweet, it is spicy. It is deep fried or roasted in an open fire. *Bambolim*: It is a dry fish, from India, like *balchão* and tamarind, but the latter in cans. The *Mucwane*, that are finely chopped greens, made with the greens from sweet peas, manioc or beans, cooked with coconut milk and *piri-piri*. *Chatenin*: Made with roasted tomato, that is then pressed with a spoon, together with fresh cilantro and, of course, *piri-piri*.

All this is served with the curry stew. The curry is served on top of plain rice. As one sees, *piri-piri* is the main condiment that is present in all dishes. Besides this curry, there is also another one, made without the milk and the Indian seasoning, prepared only with the main ingredients, fresh tomato, *piri-piri* and lemon juice. It is the so-called water and salt, not so heavy on the stomach and not so bad for one’s health as the curry is, because of all the ingredients used in its preparation. Long ago it was normal for the ladies of the big houses to have always some sort of curry ready... (1929: 5, 12-14).



Mozambique – ‘Prazo ahindo’, main house (end of 19th century), Mozambique National Archives

The sense of otherness is particularly relevant in the presentation the ‘indigenous types’ of Mozambique to the Portuguese public. A journal description published by early 20th Century reveals a strong imperial gaze already ignited by the colonial ideology, where the binary equation – us/civilized and them/indigenous – is the focus:

The indigenous are divided in tribes [...]. With respect to their [of these tribes] uses and customs, we shall confer that they are polygamous. Regarding the political regimen, they only know despotism. Cases of justice are solved through proof production based on iron ordeal, boiling water, or still a poisonous ordeal [...]. Their religion is rudimentary. They recognize the existence of a supreme being they call *mulungu*, from whom they beg nothing and who they don't worship, but many believe in the existence of a bad spirit, and all of them in the intervention of the spirits or the souls of the ancestors. When they are sick, the healer assists them, mixing coarse superstitions with beverages of proven efficacy. Their food is very simple: it is based on flour produced from millet, manioc or maize, cooked, together with curry or *quissau*, which is dry fish or meat. They enjoy dancing very much and organize dances with *batuque* (drums) whenever there is an important occasion in their lives. Therefore, there are the dances of war, of sorrow, and of the moon. There are dances only for men and only for women, and for both sexes; the latter are the most interesting because of the figures the groups perform. European civilization is slowly invading these people, modifying or banning their barbarous traditions. [...] Throughout the northern region one can also find moors that inhabit their own neighborhoods, following their values and customs.²³

²³ *Revista Occidente*, XXV (863), of December 20th, 1902, 275.



'A Kafir family and a hut' (ca. 1920),
Mozambique National Archives

What was the role of the political histories that the memories of these relationships entailed?²⁴ During the 18th and 19th centuries the northern region of Mozambique became involved in the international trade in ivory and slaves (Capela & Medeiros, 1987; Newitt, 1981; Bonate, 2007). In addition to these products, fabrics, spices and other food products were also important items in regional and intercontinental trade, circulating in the *feitorias*²⁵ along the coast (Sheriff, 1987; Feliciano & Nicolau, 1998). The kinship ties long established among important families in the Western Indian Ocean, stretching up to Gujarat and Goa, helped consolidate the system (Alpers, 1976, 2009; Isaacman, 1972; Pereira Leite, 2001; Bonate, 2007).

In parallel, as several authors refer, a substantial expansion of Islam occurred in northern Mozambique as a result of the significant population movements from the mainland to the coast and the involvement of the region in the international trade connections, especially from the 19th century onwards (Alpers, 1975; Newitt, 1995). These

²⁴ I am aware of the fact that memories are not 'stored' truths but constructions of and for the present. Whether applied to the personal or the social, this identity model memory exhibits how people interpret their lives and redesign the conditions of possibility that account for what they once were, what they have since become and what they still hope to be.

²⁵ Commercial establishments.

movements, associated with the expansion of slave trade in the region, contributed to the reinforcement of cultural contact not only along the coast, but between the coast and the inland inhabitants as well.

The continued relationship with India, as well as recurrent Indian immigration to Mozambique, maintained the flow of Indian (mainly Muslim) cultural influences. This rather heterogeneous group would later come to be known as the ‘Indian community’, which included traders (*Vanyas* [Hindu Banyan]) from Daman and Diu in Gujarat, Catholic Goans, and Muslims from Indian, and later on, from Zanzibar.²⁶

As several accounts reveal, the ‘Indian’ community was rather diverse. In terms of occupation, most Muslim and Hindu Banyan would dedicate themselves to commercial activities, whereas the Goan community was mostly associated with the colonial structures of power, as much of it was employed in the state administration, and as doctors, chemists, etc.²⁷

However, the weight of this ‘Indian community’ in the economy of Mozambique was enormous, as was the competition with the white settlers throughout the modern colonial period. In the end of the 19th century, António Ennes, at the time High Commissioner to Mozambique, and a strategist of the Portuguese colonial policy, wrote about the ‘Asians’:

Among the causes for Mozambique’s delay I should not omit what most European businessmen describe in the capital:²⁸ the incessantly renovated invasion of this province [Mozambique] by the Asians who, thick and voracious as the grasshoppers – as they say –, serve to manure the soil they ravage as a plague.

Indeed, almost all the East African coast is being exploited by an infinite number of Indians, Muslims or heathens - British or Portuguese. A traveler now finds them in Aden, piled up on the ship’s decks between bundles of cables and coops of poultry and feeding themselves throughout the trip with provisions of cooked rice with spicy drugs. Their company is not pleasant to our sight or smell. Our civilization cannot assimilate them, for it cannot even persuade them to wear trousers. Although their concurrence is important to European colonization, their hairy legs emerge from the wide folds of outfits that used to be white, as they drag their slippers in a swift way. They are involved in all sorts of business, practicing all kinds of soft plundering, both along the coast and inland. There have even been several requests of severe laws to bar and to expel them from Mozambique. Yet are these migrant crews as harmful as these interests claim?

²⁶ Then British East Africa.

²⁷ Including teachers, post officers, etc.

²⁸ At the time the capital was in the Island of Mozambique.

Certainly, the Asians enjoy special privileges. They tolerate the weather very well not only because they were born under a tropical sun and at the margins of swamps, but also because their religion, their traditions, and their meanness defend them well from temperatures that are fatal to the European colon. They live with nothing. All gains are important and plentiful so they sell and work cheaper than anyone else, adding up the berries of rice to form capitals and multiplying their interests. The bookkeeping by an Indian trader and by his European neighbor are very different, for the same commercial expenses that enrich one ruin the other. The *banyan* store is usually a small store where the Indian also lives with the salesmen and in company of four poisonous reptiles, which generate heat and filth. The shop owner doesn't kill the reptiles out of devotion, although he will eventually place them gently outside the door so they will look for hospitality elsewhere. The employees are paid curry and little else. [...] This explains why Asian colonization is so different, although I think that the Province could not survive without it (1971: 51-54).



'Group of Moors attending a party in Lourenço Marques' (ca. 1894),
Mozambique National Archives

Colonial policies were planned to force colonized people to understand themselves as others whose knowledges were presented as peripheral when compared to the modern science produced in the colonial center. Food, where curries played a central role, were suddenly transformed into the food of the 'other', an inferior group, when compared with the products imported from Europe.

However, local elites would mock the newly arrived Portuguese, producing mirror images of the 'other':

They [Portuguese colonial settlers] live in pigpens without light and air. Four or five together because 'it is easier on the pocket.' Usually three eat together at a time because it is cheaper to eat in filthy canteens. They eat a kind of soup or broth that is more like hot water in which five beans frantically swim in search of more companions... These beans, with the consistency of rocks, risk breaking teeth of any imprudent patriot, obliging the stomach of those who gobble this soup to jump and to cry in despair... What else can a spirit obsessively looking for money do!²⁹

The onset of modern colonization in Mozambique, from the end of the 19th century marked the beginning of a period of dramatic change in the region (Santos & Meneses, 2006; Alpers, 2009). Although power relations were obviously unequal, the excerpts reproduced above reveal a tense argument of the meaning and senses of belonging. The studies conducted on cuisine and identity processes have underlined the fact that once past the point of basic food security to the people who consume it, food is never perceived as a value-free and symbolically neutral source of nutrition that has haphazardly come into being (Mintz & Du Bois, 2001). Particular foods, meals, or cuisines are emblematic of nations, ethnicities, regions, and communities. Cultural biographies are constructed to show how certain foods acquire particular meanings and associations, how these change over time, and how they may be mobilized for social, economic, or political ends. Interlaced with the efficacy of symbols, the consumption of characteristic foodstuff is experienced as an act of communion that puts the eater directly in touch with the values, achievements, and heritage of an idealized past.

Food began to receive more attention because the cooking processes, the products used, came under strong scrutiny. If, from one side, local food traditions were seen with a mix of surprise and despise - a symbol of otherness -, on the other side one witnessed a concerted, though contested, movement in Portugal and in the colonial space to preserve and extend the unity and identity of the empire in the face of local cooking strategies, products, etc. In the latter case, products of Portuguese origin – like wine and dry cod fish - and cooking processes became the symbol of civilization, the icon of the empire.

²⁹ João Albasini, *O Africano (The African)*, May 13th, 1909.



“Another aspect of the interior of an old and well established food store in Lourenço Marques”, Rufino, 1929, 3: 47

Another inhabitant of the Island, D. Fernanda, referred to the diversity of practices hidden behind the word ‘curry’ throughout the conversation:

Curry is consumed in almost all regions of the country. It is something that is Mozambican... In my family we’ve always cooked it. This dish has always been present so it is part of what we are. You know, you can identify where a person comes from just by the way she cooks. Here in this region, most of the people are Muslims. There were some churches with services only when the Portuguese were here. Today, only one is functioning. Most of the Muslims were black or Indian. The Hindu would go to their temple at the end of the Island. The Christians were essentially whites and Goans. Besides the school, the place where one would witness interaction among the different groups was in the soccer field. There were teams of blacks, mulattos and Indians; the white teams would very seldom accept the presence of non-whites.

Issues of race, gender and class were revealed along the multiple accounts. The study of food systems is important to shed light on broad societal processes such as political-economic value-creation (Mintz, 1996; Hamilton, 2008), symbolic value-creation (Munn, 1986; Caplan, 1997), and the social construction of memory (Bataille & Cousin, 1996;

Sutton, 2001). In consecrated contexts, food binds people to their region, to their roots, reaffirming powerful links between food and memory.

Almost a century after the arrival of D. Inácia at Ilha (see above), another of the interviewees – D. Mariana, a Portuguese woman - recalls her arrival in Mozambique Island:

Early in December 1960, I arrived in Mozambique Island. I moved south, to Lourenço Marques, only after independence. My husband worked for the main bank, and we lived in the nice part of the Island. It was a very nice place to live, very tidy and well organized. I have wonderful memories of those days in the Island. [...] Life was easier, since we had several servants... They lived on the other side of town, in the *Macúti*. [...] I made a lot of friends while we lived there. There was a very interesting group of whites and Goans, creating a very lively society. We would visit each other and chat about children, exchange recipes... [...] That is where learned how to cook the real Indian curry like the Goans do.³⁰

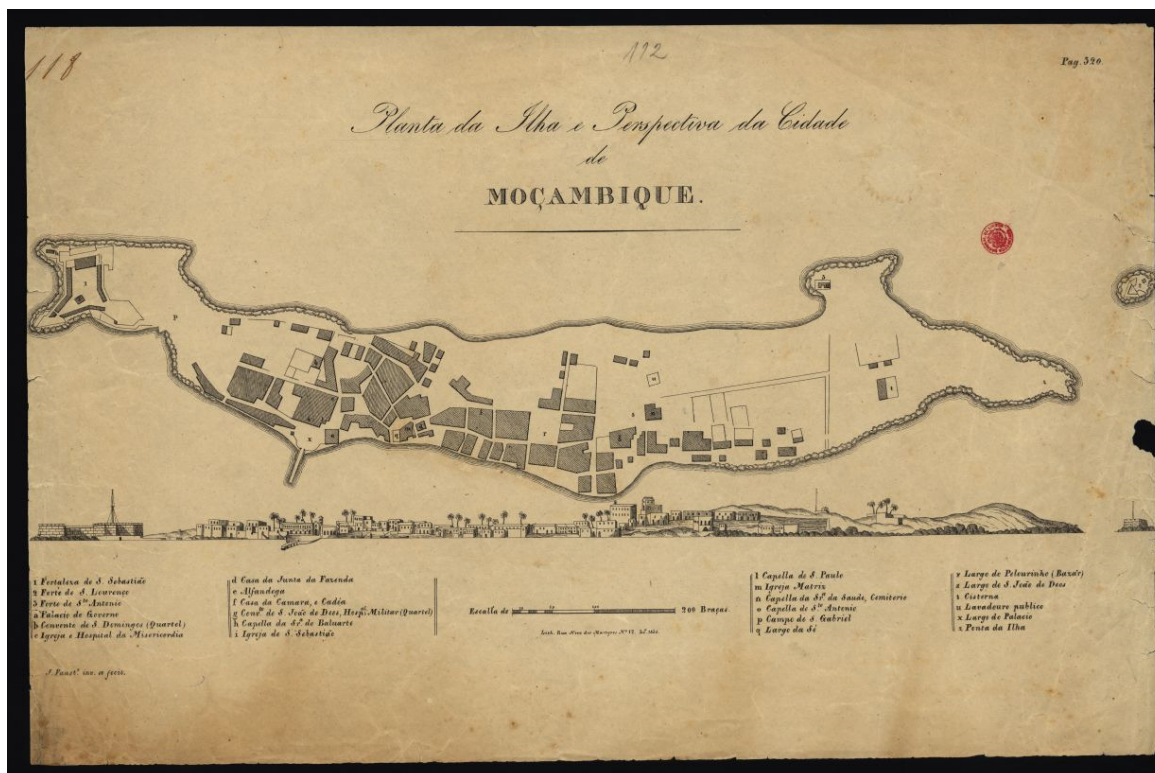
In their very simplicity, the sentiments of these women separated by a century capture the complexities of white settler feelings towards their African homelands. For many, it was not some hardship post. Mozambique Island was a grand place, a ‘corner’ of Europe in Africa. The white part of the city was beautiful, with nice houses and leisure spaces. Racial segregation marked the spaces of conviviality in the colonial city. The images and descriptions identify the colonial world with the mimetic creation of the little Europes in Africa (Said, 1978: 80), through the houses, the public spaces, and food habits. The narratives of ‘pioneers’, as the first letter depicts, have certain heroic archetypal qualities: of suffering alone in the wilderness, of battling nature and ‘the natives’ against great odds.³¹

In 1868, a couple of years before D. Inácia arrived in Mozambique, a municipal order had formalized the division of the city into two environments: the natives could only build their houses in the southern part of the Island, in the *Macúti*. From then on the city became divided into two main areas: the lime and rock city (the colonial quarters), and the *Macúti*,

³⁰ Although more than a century later, conversations held at the Island with former servants of the Portuguese settlers revealed that they would remember tastes, smells, and sounds differently from their Portuguese employers. The domestic space was, after all, ‘home’ to the Portuguese and ‘workplace’ to their servants. Nevertheless, such descriptions of the routine and habits revealed a way of relating one’s experience on colonization.

³¹ Because the Portuguese would ‘stay on’ in the colonial space, as Boxer (1969) emphasizes, it resulted in particular traits of Portuguese colonialism. While seeking to acculturate into new social structures, the Portuguese would also recreate, in the colonial spaces, iconic moments of what meant to be Portuguese: houses, gardens and other architectural elements, food habits, cooking strategies, etc.

the quarters of the colonized. Here, however, one could find Muslims, poor Christians, among others (Lobato, 1967).



Faustino, J. (ca. 1835), *Plan and Perspective of the city of Mozambique*

The reports available for the 18th century describe the presence of a very heterogeneous population in Mozambique Island (Montaury, 1955), including people from the Kingdom, Catholics from the Portuguese ports in India, Hindus and Muslims from Norwest India, mainly from Gujarat. Although the Island is rather small,³² the distribution of the population reproduced, since early on, the social reality of a colonial, segregated environment, a true germen of the future colonial urban centers. The Portuguese and Goans were usually identified as *residents* and *men in hat*,³³ inhabiting the noble area of the Island. The wealthier had houses built of stone, with a terrace and an interior patio, very

³² Three kilometers long by about half a kilometer wide.

³³ Whereas the Banyans, Moors, Heathens, were refers to as *men with a bonnet*. On this differentiation, see Hafkin, 1973: xviii.

distinct from most of the modest huts built in the southern part of the Island, where most of the population was black.



'Indigenous family from the south [Macúti] of the Island' (early 20th century), Mozambique National archives

Mozambique's urban centers were a model for cultural whiteness: sophisticated, modern, and clearly defined by race and class. Elite and middle-class colons lived in the center of the cement city while blacks, Muslims, and poor whites lived on the periphery. Their houses were large with beautiful gardens and run by black servants. The small enclave of colonial society in which they lived was where their world began and ended. In short, with their relative privilege in relation to blacks, most whites (including the Goans) found Mozambique a *good* place.

As these examples reveal, in order to understand the context in which colonial power was negotiated, transformed, maintained, transferred, disputed, we need stories that include a nuanced understanding of all the historical actors. A look at the colonial experience as a shared culture may shift our perspective regarding who exactly colonized whom.

2. Encounters, Identities, Aromas and Foods

A cultural biography of curry and an account of the ways in which it was re-imagined in the service of nation and empire will improve our understanding of the diversity of cultural representations present in contemporary Mozambique. Sources used for this part of the

study included the archives of food retailers and wholesalers, as well as culinary literature in the form of cookbooks, booklets, advertisements, and recipes, which are now recognized as important social texts and historical records. In short, these elements are highly effective instruments in the creation and consolidation of national identity.

Nowadays, curry is a gastronomic paradox in various regions of Mozambique: although a symbol of the Orient, it is often cooked in several regions of the country which do not use spices that are symbolically conceived as being oriental or Asian.³⁴ The word ‘curry’, itself a Portuguese version of the Tamil word *kari* (usually understood to mean ‘sauce’), is increasingly used in its original meaning.

Most sites on the Internet identify curry with meat or vegetables simmered in a spicy sauce or as a general variety of spiced dishes that originated in Asian cuisine, especially from South Asia. While curry is a generic term and there is no specific attribute that defines a dish as ‘curry’, the consulted Internet sites do mention some distinctive spices used in many, although certainly not all, curry dishes: turmeric, cumin, coriander, fenugreek, and *piri-piri*.³⁵

When reading through colonial literature one observes practices and concerns that are still familiar today: the commercial transformation of landscapes, and the rivalry between home, colonial, and foreign producers. All are implicit in the symbol of curry. At the same time, curry itself became a popular symbol of imperial wealth while it was also used to mock the other by constructing images of their inferiority.

The extended family plays a prominent role in social fabric of Mozambique because of continuous movement of and changes in population. In this context, the village or the community is a salient feature. When talking to an old acquaintance and catching up with the latest news on the Island, the proposal for a meal is almost immediate: “If you want to know about what has changed, what people are doing, what the new political developments are, we ought to talk! Let’s organize a big meal and we have time to talk”. People gather over big meals on festive and important occasions and such practices help reconstruct

³⁴ See, for example, the recipe of peanut curry at http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caril_de_amendoim, accessed on October 7th, 2009.

³⁵ Sites such as <http://www.cookeryonline.com/India/INDIA4.html#K>; http://www.lusitana.pt/site/html/pagina_topicos.php?conteudo=1&pid=39&topic_id=2&subtopic_id=5; <http://www.receitasemenu.net/content/category/4/162/254/>; <http://www.portugal-linha.pt/sabores/>, among others. These websites were last accessed on October 6th, 2009.

memory. Stories about past gatherings, food recipes and unforgettable meals open up the access to subaltern histories that remain undomesticated and unsullied by the national historiography and the monopolizing force of official history (Guha, 1996; Ranger, 2003). In Mozambique, the vow to writing counter-histories has privileged some memories over others. The assumption is that subaltern narratives contain trenchant political critiques of the colonial order and its postcolonial effects. Along this line, the older women of Mozambique Island would timidly claim, “what we remember is not history,” when interviewed about the histories of food habits and social changes. Filled with dissonances and ambiguities, their memories reveal the roots of social constructions *from the present to the present*, and are part of a denser fabric of social realities hidden from official historiography. These subaltern accounts that circulate in particular circuits of movement have been silenced and/or unsanctioned by the state. They are waiting to be decoded.

To eat curry, for most people, seems to steam from a kind of longing for one’s place of origin and for the tastes and the smells that one has left behind. In a time characterized by movement along the East African coast, whether as a consequence of wars or simply in search for a better life, curry encapsulates the possibility of temporarily recreating ‘things past’. For those uprooted, this means not only reaching back in time but also recreating the features of a place and social relations to which one hardly can return. To eat curry prepared “the way we always did at my mother’s house” encapsulates and circulates the story of a place where the recipe was initially produced.

Ethnicity and nationhood are born of acknowledged difference and work through contrast. In both cases, cuisine is associated with a geographically and/or historically defined eating community (*e.g.*, Roletta, 2004; Cristóvão *et al.*, 2006; Sampaio, 2007). In the African context, questions of identity have been especially vexed both by the colonial experience and by the conditions of cultural development that follow with independence. At the national level, Mozambique being a good example, identities have never developed the singularity that Western identity processes did for a time, mainly because Africa never developed the cultural institutions and systems of social regulation that have been key to the production of relatively homogenized national and cultural identities in the Global north (Mama, 2001). The applicability of Anderson’s approach to nationalism raises multiple questions in contexts where single national identities have remained poorly established,

continuously contested and less successfully hegemonic in the face of the multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious clamor of life on the continent. In short, national identities have remained very much in the making, and much less clearly imagined (Anderson, 1983). Ethnic, indigenous identities have in this sense been imagined for longer than national identities.

National cuisines may be imagined, too. If identities are continuously invented, contested, and negotiated, as contemporary social theory would have it, and as the discussion of Mozambique clearly exhibits, a national cuisine provides an added concreteness to the idea of national identity once it is imagined. Talking and writing about national food can then enhance a cuisine's conceptual solidity and coherence – much akin to the arguments developed by Appadurai (1988) on how a national cuisine is created.

What clearly emerges from the culinary literature is that for a long time curry defines the tropics and the empire, accommodating tradition while adapting to change. Every person felt obliged to eat it or at least to express an opinion about it; such was the case across class, gender and racial lines. The construction of the idea of civilization went along with the emergence of Portuguese stores, where empire producers mounted promotions and displayed their goods, in an effort to bring empire foodstuffs to the attention of the public. The imports of empire-produced foodstuffs created a consciousness of empire that linked political and moral imperatives with material life through practice.

As in other countries, Mozambique has no single cuisine. Foods and methods of preparation differ across this diverse country. Like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart. From the interviews and the review of the main publication focused on Mozambique cooking, it is clear that it is mostly women who are collecting and collating recipes, appropriating ethnic, regional and even colonial recipes into the national cuisine.

The biographies of recipes in use in contemporary Mozambique incorporate important pieces of history. Particular ingredients and modes of preparation form a distinctive basis of regional foods while identities become associated with the people who prepare and consume them.

In the context of East Africa, Mozambique is known for its good cooking. The picture of Mozambique is slowly being transformed from an image of an underdeveloped, poor, war-torn and starving country to an image in which tourism is coming to play a greater role in the national economy. In the latter image, the distinctive cuisine of Mozambique plays a central role as it is transformed into an important feature of a cultural heritage which gives the region a unique identity, formed at the intersection of foods from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Europe. Although the food is a well-integrated mixture of indigenous and global ingredients, styles and techniques, how did it come to be perceived as Mozambican?

As the opening interview of this presentation indicates, food is a family affair. Discussions around food focus on who made it, what was served, and who was there to eat it. Family meals, especially family gatherings are important and frequent. Many extended families gather for a weekly meal on Sundays. The family get-togethers as well as the consumed food inscribe a comfort zone of familiarity and satisfaction. Along with the popular curry, other dishes can be found at important celebrations, as D. Sanina described.

I really enjoy working for that lady... She was not really Portuguese. She was from somewhere in Europe, but the husband was Portuguese. I was the at-home cook until a few years ago. The couple was very exigent with hygiene. They wanted everything in the house to be spotless. But our life as maids was very good. There was plenty of food for us...

The problem was with the lady's husband. He really enjoyed potatoes. I was constantly buying and cooking potatoes. Potatoes, potatoes, potatoes... But what I really like is rice and meal made with corn or manioc flour. But rice in the house was only served when the main dish was curry. They ate lots of meat and fish, and my lady loved crabs, especially in curry sauce. [...] I had good food to eat, although even their curry was nothing like the one my mother used to cook...

The mosaic of identities present in Mozambique, from the late 19th century reveals a more complex picture than the dichotomy civilized / savage defended by early Portuguese colonial ideology. The modern colonizing policy of Portugal in Mozambique, and elsewhere, was fueled by fervor to bring civilization and Christian salvation to peoples judged to be primitive savages. This mission was given legal expression in the Colonial Act of 1930, which boldly proclaimed that: "it is the organic essence of the Portuguese nation to

carry out the historic function of possessing and colonizing overseas dominions and civilizing the indigenous populations therein contained”.³⁶

Based on the ardent belief in the ‘natural superiority’ of Portuguese culture, Portugal’s colonial policy, like other situations, was a blatant display of cultural arrogance which sought to create social differentiation that was translated into hierarchies working the relationships between the colonial settler and the native subject. This colonial project, seeking to fabric ‘indigenous’ populations in Mozambique to be ruled by the more advanced, civilized Portuguese colonizer, was a somehow fictitious exercise given the dynamic character of cultural borders in the region. Indeed, the social fabric that constituted Mozambique was much denser than this simple dichotomy: with an overwhelming population of African origin, the population reflected the long-term mixture and the boundaries shaped by the Indian Ocean trade and the Portuguese presence as well as the boundaries the same processes have brought about and reworked through times. Food talk was a shared idiom to invoke adaptations and differences muted and sharpened by what one ate. To say that a Portuguese family “ate dry rice” was to identify them approvingly as acclimatized to the region, as a way of identifying who was who: “the Goans dressed and spoke like the Portuguese; even their names were Portuguese, although at home the older generations would speak in their language. But they knew how to cook curry and the rice the proper way. They were different from the white Portuguese”, as old D. Latifa would state, reaffirming the differences inside the group of the Portuguese.

The ambiance, the smell and taste of curry and of the Island were topics intensively expressed through many of the collected oral accounts. This is evident both in practices of preparing the food “the way we cook at the Island” and through particular actions, rituals and products. In the case of curry being cooked in Maputo, it includes fish or shrimps specially brought from the Island, coconuts being grated using graters ‘from the Island’, using dry mango ‘from the North’, among a variety of products and strategies. This curry consumed in Maputo is a cultural response to historically specific socio-economic conditions.

Curry can be seen as a symbol, as something that embodies significant values and references that create and communicate meanings on a social level. Signifying identity, it

³⁶ Art. 2 of the Colonial Act of 1930 (Decree n. 18.570 of July 8th, 1930).

inspires emotions, and mobilizes action. As Mozambique recent history reminds us, when people are faced with uncertainty during troubled times, symbols reacquire particular importance, playing a key role in the dilemmas of continuity and change (Ranger, 1993; Santos, 1998).

Tastes, aromas, foods are anchors of memory, invoking contexts often silenced from the broad narrative of Mozambique identity. Migrants carry cognitive maps of tastes and smells with them (Cook & Crang, 1996) that also represent local interpretations/evocations of Mozambique. Food – in the stories around curry cooking – is a signifier of the context in which these recipes were developed and used: the house, the family, the village, the coast, and the territories of origin.

Arjun Appadurai (1988) calls the social characteristics transmitted through food “culinary syntax”. The advantage of such syntax, he notes, is its implicitness. In Mozambique, together with the existing diverse African identities, other subaltern groups such as Goans, Muslims, Chinese, etc., are today part of the national landscape. These groups correspond to social spaces that reverberate with ethnic and racial configurations and, associated with the modern colonial system, broaden the spectrum of present identities, a representation peculiarly tasted in the diverse flavors of Mozambique cooking. To view colonial experiences as forms of a shared culture suggests the need to rethink some of the basic premises regarding colonialism, such as who colonized whom. Challenging flat and monolithic portraits, this proposal confronts perspectives that essentialize the colonizers as being whites and Europeans. On the other hand, it also opens up the myth of the colonized, uncovering multiple experiences and presences.

3. Producing the Mozambican Cuisine

The appearance of national Mozambique cuisine cookbooks and their contribution to regional cuisine extend upon previous knowledge of regional contacts. Regional contacts relay subtle messages from fragments that compose the nation, calling the attention to problems associated with nation-building. This approach is quite important in Mozambique where the dominant historiography silences subaltern narratives. On one hand, recipes, dishes, products are expected to mark Mozambican boundaries despite the fact that, as mentioned above, a significant component of Mozambican food has traditionally been part

of the cuisine of the Indian Ocean area. On the other hand, the content of the dishes is negotiated from within; a subtle but necessary process of molding a shared identity, informed by one's identifications with particular communities and the values they uphold. This is present in the discourses that emerge from the multiplicity of memories and their dialectic interaction. This process reflects the thickening of the project of national history, the blending of collective memories into the dominant political historiography. As Pierre Nora relates, "memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects" (1989: 9). Dishes should also be understood as concrete elements that carry memories.

Traditional dishes, such as curry, are tangential sites of remembrance where taste or merely the debate about taste is associated with a collective belonging. Internet sites on Mozambican food are multivocal, incorporating divergent individual narratives in a clear display of dialectic interactions. Curry incorporates a set of syntax – the ingredients and the processes through which they become dishes – that unexpectedly mark social boundaries. Although people from the north, from the south, from the coastal area, and from interior regions have access to the same foodstuffs, there are marked differences between the groups' food preparation and consumption strategies.

This culinary divide is not merely a binary one: the variances of food among houses on the Island are probably as significant as in Maputo's large neighborhoods. At the same time, just as demarcations are drawn through food, so are they blurred and penetrated through food. Many dishes that originated in northern coastal areas, such as the various *achars*, *bebinca*, *chamosas*, are now widely consumed in the country.

The commitment to writing 'the history' of Mozambique has privileged some memories over others. The critical historian's task is to help remember what the colonial state once chose to forget because so often has the restoration of the collective and archived memory of the making of the *postcolonial* nation been at stake (Santos & Meneses, 2006). The assumption is that subaltern narratives contain trenchant political critiques of colonial order and its postcolonial effects. This commitment, however, may generate analytic frames less useful for understanding memories that are not about nationally salient events and memories that are devoid of adversaries and heroes, compelling plots or violent struggles. Such a focus on event-centered memory may block precisely those enduring sentiments and

sensibilities that cast a much longer shadow over people's lives and what they choose to remember and relay.

Groups remain silenced because they still don't have access to or control over knowledge production. As it turns out, oppressed or subjugated groups have found a myriad of ways to give expression to their sense of agency. If postcolonial scholars were committed to recovering the multiple ways in which history, power and historical agents are intertwined, then we would need to gain a better understanding of how colonial experiences constituted forms of a shared culture (Nandy, 1982). The myth of colonial omnipotence not only invented Western peoples' understanding of Africa and African peoples, but it did so in ways that naturalized Western supremacy and the inferiority of the others. Colonial narratives shaped widespread notions of what was good and progressive and what was omitted from a series of conceptual dichotomies that represent power, such as civilized/uncivilized, educated/uneducated, advanced/backward, and white/black, among others.

Caught between a pan and an ocean of spices and recipes, the cuisines practiced in Mozambique are discourses on access to the global world. They are a reminder of other histories that, articulated in a network, point to the presence of another cosmopolitan perspective of the world, one that combines the local and the global in ingenious ways while also suggesting other ways of being in the world. As in other cases of identity and ideology in emerging nationalism, cosmopolitanism and parochial expressions enrich and sharpen one another through a dialectical interaction that challenges the myth of the melting pot. Through food, people identify themselves (re)producing a grammar that reaffirms the presence of these individual and collective identities - on their own terms - in the present memories of belonging to a wide space – the Indian Ocean.

Tending to the work of memory means opening up multiple questions rather than accepting the past as an assumed and finished process. It invites more work on colonial memories themselves while also making the colonial a subject rather than a presumed category of analysis. In Mozambique, history has been tightly controlled as male, heroic and national. A greater and more generous rendering of what defines history, as “not really what we remembered or what indeed happened, but what can be narrated,” would leave little room for the mundane things the subalterns chose to tell. The collected oral accounts

challenge the expectation that memories of colonialism will unfold as teleological narratives of the tortuous transition from an oppressed colonial past to an ambiguous postcolonial present. Concrete recollections, the accounts are clearly a sign that the texture of the past makes its way to the present.

The description of Gravicho de Lacerda (1929) is an opening note to a world of aromas: the penetrating ambiences of the large houses in the north and the hospitality present in the region. The uses of smells and tastes go beyond the importance of remembering, consuming and commemorating. Rather, the message of the sensual memory should be mobilized to present a different picture of worldly Mozambique. Senses such as aroma and taste are undervalued in the West, possibly because “it feels to threaten the abstract and impersonal regime of modernity by virtue of its radical interiority, its boundary-transgressing propensities and its emotional potency” (Classen, Howes & Synnott, 1994: 5). Taste and smell are vehicles of memory both in practice – large shared meals, for example – and in the creation of discourse and image.

Western modernity, with its chronological and accelerated time directed towards a speeding and despotic future time, is not capable of offering a more inclusive approach of the encounters produced by colonialism in the Indian Ocean. A more inclusive approach calls for another perception of time that allows the Mozambicans, in their diversity, to contain the past within the present.

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