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Living Memories of Domestic Slavery versus Forced Labour: Freedom, dependence and oppression (Ibo Island, Cabo Delgado)

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Living memories of slavery in the Querimbas Islands, especially Ibo Island, are apt to reserve some surprises. When talking about slavery, some elders' shared memories sometimes seem to be defensive, serving to justify the practice of slavery rather than decrying it. This may be ascribed to several factors. The reasons which lie behind this viewpoint seem to be related to recent past events in which forced labour and political repression of dissent were extremely cruel as to obscure the mistreatment of slaves. This paper will inquire into the memories of forced labourers and descendants of domestic slaves as well as into the policies that preserved servants from being coerced into forced labour.

Keywords: domestic slavery, forced labour, memories, migration, domestic servant, labour stratification

Memórias vivas da escravatura doméstica versus trabalho forçado: Liberdade, dependência e opressão (Ilha do Ibo, Cabo Delgado)

As memórias vivas da escravidão nas Ilhas Querimbas, especialmente na Ilha do Ibo, podem reservar algumas surpresas. Quando se fala de escravatura, as memórias partilhadas por alguns anciãos parecem por vezes defensivas, servindo para justificar a prática da escravatura em vez de a condenar. Isto pode ser atribuído a vários fatores. As razões que estão por trás deste ponto de vista parecem estar relacionadas com acontecimentos do passado recente, em que o trabalho forçado e a repressão política da dissidência foram extremamente cruéis, ao ponto de ensombrar os maus-tratos aos escravos. O presente artigo debruçar-se-á sobre as memórias dos trabalhadores forçados e dos descendentes de escravos domésticos, bem como sobre as políticas que preservaram os servos de serem coagidos a trabalhar como trabalhadores forçados.

Palavras-chave: escravatura doméstica, trabalho forçado, memórias, migração, empregado doméstico, estratificação do trabalho

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While collecting memories of domestic slavery in Ibo Island and the mainland facing the Querimbas, it was impressive that, contrary to my expectations, a number of those I interviewed in Ibo did not deprecate slavery, even though some of their forefathers, and indeed fathers, had been *comprados,* in other words, bought. *Comprado* was one of the words used to denote slaves. Yet, and especially on the Island of Ibo, some people claimed that every white family had some black family members. Some such families are now in Portugal while others are still in Ibo. My preconceived idea was that slavery, or being enslaved, in all cases, would have been a harsh experience and not a desirable condition. But such an assumption was challenged on being told that sometimes people preferred to be the dependents of those who were strong and wealthy enough to protect them, especially from the raids of warrior groups like the Ngoni, rather than finding themselves elsewhere, freer but defenceless. Thus, in such situations dominated by structural violence (Farmer, 2002) some people preferred – I was told – to actually offer themselves as slaves to families of wealthy compounds rather than remain on their own but unprotected. The walls of the compound of a wealthy master seemed to be a desirable fence separating an internal safe area from an external environment fraught with dangers. In addition, an elderly woman revealed that a slave would always have some flour for his or her meals, which was not always the case in times of famine for people living outside the compound, albeit non-slaved (Interview with Hawa Athumani, Ibo, 12 September 2008).[1] In other words, being enslaved in Ibo was depicted as a condition in which people could be sheltered from uncertainties and insecurity rather than being oppressed and unhappy. In contrast, interviews with people who had undergone forced labour in the sisal plantations described very harsh treatment and punishment when labour assigned was not completed as required.[2]

Research questions, then, were moulded by these results and I started asking how and why memories were recalled this way: which conditions fed such a position on slavery and which experiences of slavery were conducive to memories of this kind in the Ibo Island. Could it be that the most recent events of forced labour, as well as the repression of political dissent by the pre-Independence Portuguese government, was crueller and less desirable than domestic servitude ever was?

This paper arises from reflections stemming from a research project aimed at collecting in the field living memories of slavery, carried out basically in two

[1] From this example it transpires that famines were common in this area. (See also Declich, 2017, pp. 189-190). Some of the interviewees' names are pseudonymous to protect their privacy.

[2] Interviews in Arimba and Metuge with two groups of people and some elders who had been working as forced labourers.

areas of northern Mozambique between 2008 and 2018: in some villages in between Lichinga and Cobué with Yao and Njanja speakers (Nyasa Province) and two coastal areas of Cabo Delgado Province, Ibo, Kiziwa and Querimba Islands (Mozambique) and several villages on the mainland facing the Querimbas Islands or close to Pemba, including Quissanga, Metuge and Arimba as well as Changa.[3] The material addressed directly in this article is only a small part of the entire body of data collected which form the bases of the reflections enlarged upon in this article.[4]

From slavery to compulsory labour by laws

During the nineteenth century a number of decrees addressed the abolition of slavery in the Overseas Provinces of Portugal. On December 14th 1854 a decree required the registration of all the slaves of the Overseas Provinces and considered *libertos*[5] all the slaves who remained un-registered.[6] Those slaves brought across the land were also to be considered *libertos* and the latter had to keep serving their masters for ten years. A registration of the slaves and the *libertos* was requested from all the Mozambican provinces.[7] The register of Cabo Delgado completed in October 1875 numbered 2,205 slaves and 3,007 *libertos*.[8] In 1875 the Carta-Lei of April 29th abolished the status of *liberto*; the people still in that position were obliged to hire out their services for two years, preferably to their pre-

[3] The first area, Lichinga – Cobué, was covered in 2007 together with personnel working for ARPAC in Lichinga. I thank the historian Emanuel Dionísio, who was then responsible for the ARPAC office. Memories in the Ibo Island and the mainland facing the Querimbas were gathered by returning to the area in several consecutive years. Overall, in the first trip, about 10 interview settings were organized with rational authorities, sometimes including a number of people in a focus group (in the first trip) and more than 80 interviews were gathered from several different subjects in the second area. All data were gathered in the context of a Framework Agreement of the University of Urbino with the University Eduardo Mondlane, in collaboration with ARPAC, *Arquivo do Património Cultural*, and under the auspices and funding funds of the MEIMM project co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with research funds granted by from University of Urbino. Many of the interviewees were pointed out by government authorities as knowledgeable, key people on this issue. Fieldwork on memories of slavery and maroon societies gathered years before in southern Somalia prompted obvious comparisons and considerations on the topic.

[4] Eduardo Medeiros wrote extensively about slavery in Cabo Delgado mainly based on written sources. One doctoral thesis addresses the social history of Ibo at the turn of the twentieth century, exploring forms of colonial justice through an analysis of some court cases (Thomaz, 2012). Two scholars have carried out fieldwork in this area in the 1980s: António Rafael da Conceição (2006) and Bendito Brito (1990).

[5] *Liberto* means literally "freed slave"; but the status of a *liberto* was different from that of a free born person as he/she could not dispose of his/her work.

[6] *Decreto de 14 de Dezembro de 1854*, José Máximo de Castro Neto Leite e Vasconcellos, 1854, pp. 836-842; Zamparoni, 2012, p. 33.

[7] Registers of this process were compiled in 11 districts of Mozambique. Daniel Domingues da Silva and Edward Alpers have collaborated in producing a database of these registers with funds from Rice University.

[8] AHM FSXIX Cod. 11 - 1936 *Registo dos libertos de Cabo Delgado,* 19 Oct. 1875; AHM FSXIX Cod. 11 - 1936 *Registo dos escravos de Cabo Delgado,* 19 Oct. 1875.

vious masters.[9] In addition to such laws, a regulation was issued on November 21st of 1878 abolishing the public guardianship on the ex-slaves and establishing that Africans were free to get contracts from whatever patron, disregarding the primacy of their previous masters; yet, the worker could not break the contract or change patron as they could be incriminated for vagrancy and the new patron be fined.[10] Notwithstanding the promulgation of the laws, and the fact that registers were being produced, there are doubts as to the extent to which these laws had really been applied in Mozambique and in Cabo Delgado when 21 years later, in 1899, the Indigenous Labour Law (*Código do Trabalho Indígena*) established that in the Portuguese Overseas Provinces the indigenous people had the obligation (moral and legal) to work in order to improve their social condition. Should they fail to do as required, the government could force them to work. The philosophy behind the Indigenous Labour Law was that the end of slavery for Africans should not mean "right not to work" and, apparently, the challenge of those jurists was to make the Overseas Provinces productive.[11] In other words, the freedom of the African workers legally established in 1878 became limited by the obligation to work, with the eventuality of being assigned a job. Apparently, before 1884, armed protests flared up in Ibo against a recruitment of contracted free workers which looked suspicious to the rebellious; in fact, the regulation of June 1881 permitted contracting labourers to be shipped to Mayotte and Nossi-bé.[12] The legal transition from slavery to a servitude under tight contracts and then to licensing the imposition of forced labour[13] on Africans did not take a long time. There are reports for several parts of Mozambique of the extent to which, in the first decades of the twentieth century, former slaves were conscripted to work in very harsh conditions, enduring food shortages and cruel treatment (Zamparoni, 2012). The intensity of the required labour from the population progressively increased until the times of the Independence (Isaacman, 1992). Forced labourers in the plantations were pushed to return to their original home and should not establish close to the estates. Measures were taken as to extract as much labour

9 *Carta-Lei de 29 de Abril de 1875*.

10 *Regulamento para os Contratos de Serviçaes e Colonos nas Províncias da África Portugueza* (José Máximo de Castro Neto Leite e Vascocellos, 1854, pp. 380-387; Zamparoni, 2012, p. 49).

11 Zamparoni analyses a number of documents written by António José Ennes and more in general the philosophy that lied behind the laws that brought to the Indigenous Labour Law (Zamparoni, 2012, pp. 36-63).

12 This is suggested by Daniel Domingues da Silva and Edward Alpers on the base of TNA FO 541, Confidential Prints, Slave Trade 25 (1883) 34, no. 44, Consul O'Neill to Earl Granville, 15 Feb. 1883 (Domingues da Silva & Alpers, 2021, p. 15).

13 Discussion on the definition and impact of forced labour is becoming more articulated. See Allina, 2012; Cahen, 2012, pp. 149-171; Zamparoni, 2012. For instance, to give further depth to the analysis (to improve depth in the analysis), Guthrie asserts that forced labour meant also restriction of movements which was not applied to free workers (2016, pp. 195-212).

as possible from all the strata of the population (Zamparoni, 2004). Memories may help to unravel aspects of real life which may not altogether square with the initial juridical efforts of abolishing slavery.[14]

Querimbas Islands and their mainland

The island of Ibo and the Querimbas Islands are an area of present-day Mozambique in Cabo Delgado province where traders of different origins, French, British, Portuguese, Arabs, Indians, Madagascan and others have landed at different times over a span of no fewer than five centuries, for which we have written sources in European languages. The ports were frequently visited by foreign businessmen, slaves were traded as well as ivory and other merchandise. The parish priest of Querimba (1592-1594) describes the Querimbas Islands in 1609 mentioning a church, *Nossa Senhora do Rosario*, built in 1580 by Diogo Rodrigues Corrêa, attesting Portuguese commitment to the colonization and "Christianization" of this area (Dos Santos, 1892, p. 129). French traders visited the island as early as 1740 in search of slaves (Boxer, 1963, p. 344). Cabo Delgado was one of the Portuguese foreign territories and following the legislation of the Portuguese Overseas Provinces of the Marquês de Pombal in 1752, the islands of Cabo Delgado with the mainland facing them, then recognized administratively as *capitania-mor*, became a subordinate government of the Mozambique Province. In Ibo Island, a first fort was erected in 1754 and the town was built in 1761. Ibo became an important administrative centre in Cabo Delgado with an urban settlement and several little forts until 1902 when the capital of the Cabo Delgado district was transferred to Porto Amélia, present-day Pemba. The island of Ibo has a unique history, also as a place in which a large part of the Portuguese of the then subordinate government of the Province had been living for centuries and had then interacted with the local population. From Ibo, like from the other ports of the province, some of which mainly inhabited by Muslim or Makhwa traders, slaves were sold. As in their homeland, the Portuguese used to have slaves in Ibo. The long term presence of Portuguese and other foreigners until the beginning of the twentieth century produced a significant population of mixed people in the Ibo island, sometimes referred to as *filhos da terra* resulting from formal or non-formalized conjugal relations entertained by the Portuguese and other foreigners with the local population.[15] The layers of stratification among foreigners, *filhos da*

[14] For southern Tanzania, close to Cabo Delgado see also Becker, 2013 (pp. 71-87), 2017 (pp. 127-52), 2021 (pp. 87-109).

[15] For a description of this population strata in other Portuguese territories see also Candido (2012, pp. 65-84) and Ernesto Jardim de Vilhena (1905, p. 227).

terra, Makhwa of the hinterland, slaves and descendants of slaves are complex and may not be analysed here. Yet, it is important to notice that memories of slavery are interwoven with the historical events and also reflect the social stratification of this area.

Memories of domestic slavery versus forced labour

Cabo Delgado in northern Mozambique is a large region in which experiences of slavery have been varied according to the role played by the subjects involved. Raids in the hinterland within the Macuana region could lead to people becoming slaves in different conditions: slaves, in the sense of captives, were women kidnapped for the purpose of marriage by individuals of other groups in the surroundings[16]; slaves could be children raided from villages in distant areas and thereafter brought up in places other than their places of birth; slaves could be taken as infants; slaves could be people who lived in compounds of wealthy people in urban areas; slaves could be people born in such compounds as second, third or any other generation of slaves; slaves could be people who themselves offered to become slaves of somebody they reputed could offer them a protection they could not secure otherwise; slaves could be brought in caravans and sold. People pawned in compensation of debts could happen to never be ransomed and eventually be regarded as slaves. Thus, the experience of being enslaved and becoming a slave could have been of very different kinds depending on the context.

All memories are often shaped and moulded according to the need for them to be kept alive.[17] Memories can be also be manipulated and used politically. Several decades ago Martin Klein reflected on the appropriateness of collecting memories of slaves, as they are often people who would rather forget their past of unfreedom (Klein, 1989). In the following years many have been the studies addressing memories of slavery and its aftermath.[18] Researchers' experience has shown that oral sources concerning slavery must be analysed according to the socio-historical context in which they are recollected, and the positionality of the person describing the slavery experience must also be taken into account.[19]

[16] See, for instance, Geffray (1985).

[17] Just to mention a few, Jewsiewiscki (2011); Green (2004); Saville (2003); Shaw (2002); Gengenbach (2008); Declich (2018).

[18] There is an ongoing large ERC project addressing the aftermaths of slavery with five case studies in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and the Eastern Congo directed by Felicitas Becker. Results are in progress.

[19] For southern Tanzanian plantations Felicitas Becker has shown the extent to which the multiplicity of positionalities of the subjects interviewed can lead to multifaceted versions of the context of slavery (Becker, 2013).

Moreover the historical present or specific political events of a recent past may have conditioned the way in which certain past experiences are considered positively as opposed to others which, in retrospect, may instead should have been viewed more negatively.

Analysing some of the statements contained in the interviews concerning slavery, perspectives stemming from interviews made on the mainland (Changa, Metuge, Paquitequete) and on the island of Ibo are different. On the mainland, some interviews described the process of enslavement within the local population.[20]

> People kidnapped women and took them as slaves. In my family there were two girls who were kidnapped when they were fetching water; they married in the Maconde area, and lived there where they had been taken. Their children were not considered pure Maconde, but not slaves. (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008, p. 4)

These two girls only came back to where they were born much later, after Independence, just for a visit as their lives and their children were now with the Maconde.

In the old days treatment of slaves was harsh, at least in the accounts concerning the Makhwa of the mainland. The slaves were not entitled to eat with the free and the free were afraid that they might poison their food or water. Slaves could not sleep in the presence of the master, they could only go to sleep but when everybody else was sleeping. Also children could not play with slaves for fear that something bad could be done to them. When there was a funeral of a noble person some slaves were buried alive with the corpse (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008). Memories of families recounted by a sixty-six-year-old chief in the surroundings of present-day Pemba describe some characteristics of the life of slaves among the Makhwa.

> In this area the traders did not arrive directly, but people were captured and sold on the Lurio river. People were also captured in Montepuez and Nampula… We had captives in our family: Konani, Mwalipanani, Mwaweya and Nnakiphwanyava

[20] In Ibo and the mainland facing the island the memories could be gathered from knowledgeable people who had heard about slavery from their relatives or were descendants of domestic slaves. While asserting to descend from free people some interviewees suggested however that all the African people living in the island, as they do not speak the local African language Emakhwa, but the Kimwani version of Kiswahili, nor belong to any of the Makhwa matrilineages *nhihimo*, which marked free people (Abel dos Santos Baptista, 1951) descend most likely from a miscegenation among the traders of several foreign origins and the local African population. In the mainland it was especially traditional authorities who were interviewed and described how slavery was in the old days.

> were women and Nrimawee and Nkive were men… They worked in the field… If they behaved well the male slaves were also given a wife. (Interview with *Régulo* Athumani, Paquitequete, 5 September 2008, pp. 21-22)

Memories of having to escape from the Ngoni raids are recurrent among many people of both the mainland and Querimbas islands (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008, p. 1; interview with Machude Nazi, Metuge, 8 September 2008, pp. 4, 9). "There was a time in which the Ngoni used to raid villages to take people as slaves and sell them somewhere else… They kidnapped people to sell them" (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008).

People escaping from the Ngoni would do anything to find a secure place and were ready to offer themselves as slaves in quintals of wealthy people in Ibo (Interview with Ali Omari). When the Ngoni raided, people arrived in the island seeking a secure place (Interview with Hawa Athumani).

As to what happened to the slaves sold and brought somewhere in Cabo Delgado and why they often did not escape from where they had been taken, a general answer is that "there were certain 'medicines' to make them forget the place where they came from" (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008, p. 1). Moreover some of the people that were sold as slaves were for instance serial philanderers harassing married women or "layabouts", thieves, adulterers, or trouble makers and crooks (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008, p. 7; interview with Bendito Brito, Nampula, 6 August 2010) whom, having once been sold, could not come back to where they originated from.

An extended family of a chiefly lineage is described as one in which the practice of keeping the labour force of the slaves within the household was common. Captives were considered part of the group as manpower and it was worth holding on them (Interview with *Régulo* Athumani, Paquitequete, 5 September 2008, p. 23). "There was no point in selling the captives because those were useful for the work they could do." In this light the process of abolition is described as a transition from being slaves to being family members: "When slavery was abolished those who were slaves carried on in the household as family members" (Interview with *Régulo* Athumani, Paquitequete, 5 September 2008). Thus, in the aftermath of abolition households of free people often included some slaves or descendants of slaves. Notwithstanding that the position of the slaves changed with the abolition of slavery, the people in that position were still treated differently within the group, although their descent was kept hidden. It is noticed,

however, that some of them even arrived to positions of power through having been brought up in the homestead of a *régulo*.[21]

Descriptions from Ibo island view slavery from another perspective although it is clear that in Ibo Portuguese and aristocratic families kept their distance from the slaves and the servants. Slaves could not enter the master's home and were not allowed to approach the *quintal* with their shoes on. Also, from the old days, cruel treatment was reported; as an example, a punishment for misbehaviour could include "hot iron passed on the head of the slave" (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 11 September 2008). People who described slavery were sometimes themselves descended from slaves. In such cases, slavery was evaluated in comparison with their present condition perceived as one of poverty, and a sort of nostalgia was shown for the forms of protection and abundance of facilities which were available to slaves/servants, unlike the time that was to come.

Paulinha, an Ibo woman in her sixties, daughter of a European man and a servant of his house, described how women servants of slave descent who became pregnant by any of the males belonging to the *quintal*'s patron faced two options: either they would be sent away or they could be accepted into the household together with their offspring. Yet, she said:

> Slaves could not go anywhere else [than here] as they did not know the land they came from… so they had to stay… However, in those days one could find everything…, it is now that things are difficult to find. There was everything, clothes and cloth and food because it was the masters themselves who provided for it. (Interview with Paulinha Peres, Ibo, 12 September 2013, pp. 4-5)

On the contrary a Makhwa woman, a queen of her lineage, presents a different picture. When a child was born of a slave woman by her master, several possible options could be pursued depending on the temperament of the master. The abused woman could be transferred elsewhere or sold. The child could even be killed (Interview with Queen Namanga, Paquitequete, 9 September 2008).

Another case of a positive vision of domestic slavery was that a slave of Ibo's wealthy families would always have some food to eat even in times of generalized famine.[22]

I was then obviously spurred to compare these points of view with memories of the experiences of forced labourers in Cabo Delgado (Mozambique) in between approximately 1965 and 1974 which are generally recollected as extreme-

[21] There is a case where a man descendant of slaves who was eighty years old in 2008 and was brought up in the *régulo*'s home, became one of the most knowledgeable about the history of the area.

[22] See more descriptions of this case in Declich (2017).

ly harsh and unpleasant. Narratives of forced labourers' experiences describe young and older men being wrenched from their homes, obliged to work for six months in sisal plantations under extremely difficult conditions and subject to cruel punishments if they failed to finish the work they were assigned. Workers were roped together at a distance of five meters one another (Interview with Hiahia Ngumati, Paquitequete, 24 August 2015). A certain piece of land should be tilled in a day; if it was not finished, a second day and a third day were granted, after which punishment was inflicted. The most common was the *palmatória*, that meant being beaten repeatedly on the palms of the hands with a wooden tool, a sort of a spade with wooden rounded spikes. A labourer could be beaten 20 times on each hand. People who underwent the *palmatória* still had to finish their work with aching hands. When the forced labourers were discharged after the conscription period their salary was reduced by the amount needed for tax payments (Interview groups of elders in Metuge, 9 September 2013; interview with Ajimo Niparacusa, 9 September 2013). Some young people from Arimba were successful in fleeing their homes before the press-ganging was enforced, thereby managing to evade conscription (Interview with a group of elders in Arimba, 14 November 2014). The others had to work for six months in places like Nangororo, Namanja e Nyamwabala. Memories of forced labour – some of them from locations along the coast opposite the Querimbas Islands – were much more scathing than those of slavery, but were not conflated with slavery narratives. Some of the events recounted for forced labour are similar to the exploitation of the slaves working in sugar factories of the French Antilles, as follows:

> When working at the sisal fibre, sometimes the machine would catch the arm of somebody which had to be cut in a single stroke with a machete because otherwise the entire body could be taken into the machine. (Interview with Ajimo Niparacusa, 9 September 2013, p. 28)

In addition, life around the sisal factory is reported as being close to destitution with very little food and clothing available.

The cruelty of the Portuguese repression of dissent came to the fore when interviewing two men in Ibo about slavery (Interview with Ruben Osman, Ibo, 11 September 2008, p. 12, and interview with Athumani Taiari, Ibo, 11 September 2008).[23] Both switched narrative and talked about the Ibo fortress which was used by the Portuguese to seclude and even finally kill many presumed or real political dissidents, especially in the period before the Independence of Mozambique.

[23] They were born in Ibo and have worked at the fortress during colonial times.

They decided to talk about what they considered bad experiences of abuse rather than about slavery.

During colonial times (until just before 1974), one of the Ibo fortresses, the São João Baptista fortress, was used by the PIDE (*Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*) as a prison. Especially in the final years previous to Independence, people were often imprisoned before their offences could be proved, even just sympathising with the FRELIMO (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*) movement was then considered a crime so that people were tortured or killed on mere suspicion of such political affiliation. This repressive activity was intensified in the lead up to Independence.

One of the men, Ruben, the offspring of a relationship between a Banyan man and a woman of slave origin, but successfully introduced into the business affairs of his father as a specialized artisan, had this to say:

> Some people continued slavery… but those were times in which nobody dared open their mouths because the PIDE tortured people. You only had to make comments to be seized among those cocoa trees... among those cocoa trees [behind the Ibo fortress] there were mass graves containing 10, 20 or even 30 people. Some [prisoners] were thrown in alive after being cruelly beaten up. Some of those people asked us to leave them hidden in the bush so that, should they recover, they could escape. But for us this was very dangerous because if we had been discovered, the PIDE would have shot us. (Interview with Ruben Osman, Ibo, 11 September 2008, p. 12; interview with Athumani Taiari, Ibo, 11 September 2008)

And yet, during his fieldwork in Ibo in the 1980s, António Rafael da Conceição (2006) highlights the persistence of subordinate relations reconnecting to slavery and Bendito Brito (1990) asserts that forms of slavery continued until Independence (Interview with Bendito Brito, Nampula, 2010). In addition, the treatment of the servants in Ibo at the turn of the twentieth century and the following years did not appear particularly mild. This emerges clearly from several court cases collected in Fernanda Thomaz's thesis (2012) which might have been extreme cases of the systemic violence practised in the patron-servant relationship: for instance, in 1897, the eight-year-old António, an orphan, having escaped from the home of Jorge de Souza because he had suffered mistreatment, on being returned there was brutally beaten by his ex-patron;[24] or in 1918 the man José Araújo da Cunha obliged two of his servants to work from 5 to 18 hours without rest and little food and punished them with *palmatória* should they fail to finish

[24] AHM – Conselho de Cabo Delgado no Ibo, Juizo de Direito da Comarca, cx. 78, ano 1897. Auto-crime, n.º 283 (Thomaz, 2012, p. 186).

the task assigned, and some years later that same patron was tried twice for beating his servants residing in Mucojo and locking them up in a private calaboose.[25]

Questioning memories

A question inevitably arises: why is it that living collective memories develop in a certain way in one context and a different way in another, and, specifically, why, in islands such as Ibo, the perception of the status of being enslaved is not recalled so negatively as it is in other contexts? Possibly also because in that island memories refer to slaves who belonged to a *quintal*, i.e. compound, a sort of domestic unit including extended families of servants and slaves belonging to the household of the master or mistress and brought up accordingly.[26] If nothing else these owners were rich and the life in their *quintal* might have been less harsh than elsewhere, possibly more comfortable than as forced workers on a sisal plantation.

How come that in the case of Ibo Island some informants seem nostalgic for that period? Was it that domestic slaves on the island enjoyed a better kind of treatment, however discriminatory, than they would have encountered elsewhere, in circumstances where poverty and the labour policies would have made them vulnerable?

Slave status is described as a fact that could not be avoided and, sometimes, depended on the condition of poverty. Lady Hawa Athumani, one organizer of the female initiation rituals (*riga*) in the island, who was thirteen-year-old when the *Companhia do Niassa* left the area (1929), described the process through which a child could become a personal slave in Ibo and, possibly, elsewhere. Often in Ibo poor people could request shelter from a wealthy family. She said:

> If a woman had been a servant in a home and died in pregnancy, the child could thus be brought up as a personal slave by the family for whom the servant had been working… [Or] if a woman in extreme poverty had requested to be fed by a wealthy family in times of famine when she could not support herself, she might leave her child to that family as compensation. (Interview with Hawa Athumani, Ibo, 14 September 2013)

In other words, leaving behind a child in compensation for having been supported in times of famine or extreme hardship was considered a matter of fact

[25] AHM – Conselho de Cabo Delgado no Ibo, Juizo de Direito da Comarca, cx. 86 and 89, ano 1924 and 1925. Autocrime, n.º 283 (Thomaz, 2012, p. 188).

[26] I have dealt elsewhere with the specific construction of domesticity in this area of Mozambique (Declich, 2015).

that could not possibly be avoided.[27] In poor conditions during famines or when the villages were ravaged by raiding Ngoni[28], who would then sell the prisoners as slaves, people sometimes discovered advantages in having to work for the wealthy, even though it meant assuming the status of slaves (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 11 September 2008). Memories of this scenario make the point that slaves in a home were protected (albeit they risked abuse) but they could certainly survive in contexts of hardship by finding food, work and shelter. This kind of dependency status was very different from that one would encounter in the event of being raided, brought by a caravan from the interior and, thereafter, in all likelihood, sold.

Protection against raids and famine seemed to be a priority at the turn of the twentieth century. Ali Omari, born in 1933 and considered among the elders of the island, says:

> In those days people lived in fear and were taken advantage of, but when they took refuge in the compounds (*quintais*) they felt at ease; they did not care about the money, but about security. (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 11 September 2008, pp. 5-6)

Being the grandson of an African grandmother who had a child by a wealthy man of Ibo, his knowledge comes from stories passed down within his extended family.

Some other memories follow the same line. For instance, a seventy-year-old man, having, as the child of a slave woman, been a servant in a very wealthy family, was not particularly concerned about his "poor destiny"; rather, he was proud of having enjoyed a high quality of life (for that context) in an affluent home (Declich, 2015). Mother and child had stayed on as servants in the home and were considered "people of that *quintal*". This testimony questions the usual assumptions about the undesirable status of those slaves who, after abolition, continued working as servants in the same home in which they – or their relatives – had been slaves. Apparently, there were some advantages in being part of the people of the *quintal*: while they were employed – maybe not paid but maintained – by the family of the masters of their ancestors, they could not be conscripted into forced labour.

[27] This idiographic testimonial, although it refers to one specific case, can give an idea of the generalized practice of becoming a dependent slave in the event of famine; this choice was not just one's individual idea but a shared pattern of behaviour in similar cases in this territory.

[28] A number of attacks by the Ngoni Mafites against the mainland facing the Querimbas Islands are reported for the years 1878, 1880, 1881, 1883. The memory of the Ngoni raids was still alive among the interviewees. The islands had been raided earlier on in 1800, 1808, 1815, 1816, 1817 from the sea by the Sacalava from Madagascar.

Memories of past slavery on Ibo Island contain few descriptions of hardship and punishment but, rather, feature a plethora of examples in which slaves/servants were occupied in different characteristic activities and errands, serving the masters' household: the personal slaves devoted their daytime hours to serving and attending the master; some slaves made visits and performed errands for their masters; the slaves of the veranda only admitted visitors who would be welcomed by the master; the slave leaders of the *quintal* directed all the others – some worked in the kitchen, some were messengers of the owner, others performed menial tasks, sometimes of the most unpleasant kind. Membership of a certain *quintal* did not exempt slaves from behaving with due deference to their owners. This would entail in addition to removing their shoes before entering the house, desisting from communication with the master unless specifically requested, and personal slaves could only eat after the master's meal (Interviews with: Ruben Osman, Ibo, 11 September 2008, rub 1b, p. 11; António Baptista, Ibo, 5 September 2009; Hawa Athumani, Ibo, 11 September 2008). A description of domestic slavery particularly harmonious has been depicted by a man who, even being the son of a servant, was integrated into the patron's family because the woman did not beget children on her own. His life, therefore, was that of one of the lucky mixed children who were accepted and educated by the patrons (Interview with António Baptista, Ibo, 5 September 2009).

However, in most memories that I was able to collect, slavery was not considered as leading to hardship nearly as much as forced labour was.

The production of this kind of memories and the perception of slavery which lies behind them can be related to some factors: memories of people who had been sold to the slave market and shipped away do not emerge from these recollections; almost all memories gathered in Ibo refer to domestic slavery in an urban context, usually in wealthy compounds, and not to experiences of people kidnapped and then sold to plantation owners in faraway places, or recruited as indentured labourers. In other words, these memories concern people who have been more or less successfully integrated. The memories reported in by Makhwa speakers of Metuge and Changa describe domestic slavery within the Makhwa, an institution that subordinated the captives to a sort of integration on the margins of society. The recalls of those who ended up sold also were not captured.

The process of abolition certainly informs some of the memories reported, such as the one about the slaves that should come to be considered as family members. More than one Makhwa interviewee of the coast stresses that such and such slaves of their families were in fact later considered as "family members". For instance, Athumani recounts: "I have Abdul, a slave that my grandfather

brought from Quirimba, but today is part of the family" (Interview with *Régulo* Athumani, 5 Sept. 2008, p. 23).[29] The way in which the previous slaves or their descendants were integrated into the group is described as follows:

> People did not comment in public about the past status of a slave. Only some knew in secret, but even then it was recommended that such a person was considered as a family member. (Interview with *Régulo* Athumani, 5 September 2008, p. 23)

Memories, female slaves and their children

The position of female slaves among the domestic slaves was clearly different from that of the males, particularly in the context of islands like Ibo.

There were many cases of children born of women of the *quintal* and fathered by males of the master's family[30] or even by the acquaintances of the family (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 15 November 2014 and other sources). Should a girl of a *quintal* become pregnant by a man from another *quintal*, she might be transferred to that man's *quintal* and, later, some of her children sent back to work in the *quintal* she had left in order to replace her labour (Ruben Osman, 11 September 2008). Considering that Muslim people based part of the control of the trading area on serial marriages,[31] also certain Christians, notwithstanding their spiritual leaders' teachings, were unwilling to pass up this opportunity.[32] Mixed children were often included in the household, albeit not all with the same rank as the offspring of the actual wife, but sometimes in the guise of very trustworthy servants, servants of a special kind. In this way, the island of Ibo and some of the surrounding areas – where in the nineteenth century the Christian aristocrats of the northern areas of Cabo Delgado concentrated – developed a peculiar social fabric. The social group of the house, in a sort of very extended family stratified by rank, also included people born within the *quintal*. Some of those individuals were, in fact, slaves, but some of those slaves, being also children of one man of the family, might become part of a group with somewhat higher status than their fellows. Were the pregnancy to result from the husband of a family,

[29] Consider that Athumani's "today" means that this man was brought from Querimba well after the abolition of slavery had been declared.

[30] In the island, and in some of the surrounding villages, European people were Christian. Christian men could not marry more than one woman, nor should, according to their Christian ethics, have lovers. Yet, priests of the parishes of the area at the end of the nineteenth century complained all the time that Christian male parishioners did not marry but lived with concubines.

[31] See for instance, the *shariif* all over the coast of the Indian Ocean or the Muslim traders (Declich, 2016; Ho, 2006). The assertion is also based on an interview with Mohamed, Ibo, 13 September 2013.

[32] This aspect is dealt with in a forthcoming chapter (Declich, 2024).

the chance that a child might be included depended also on the tolerance of the wife who could insist that both the woman and child be sent away (Interview with Paulinha Peres, Ibo, 12 September 2013). In addition, the children born in the *quintal* from slaves of the *quintal* were considered more educated, which, in this case, meant being better able to live in an urbanized context, more suitable for employment in the family business, unlike people recently arrived from the hinterland. Those coming from the hinterland were the slaves to be sold; yet the youngest of these could be more attractive for local use as they could be brought up from childhood to acquire an urban mindset and to behave in the "educated" way expected by their masters.

As Ali Omari reported, "All the white people who lived here in Ibo had black families, I have a white family which is in Portugal, too" (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 11 September 2008, p. 3). There was obviously a process of miscegenation, a process which is also recognized by today's inhabitants of Ibo.

Slaves, servants and forced labourers

In the living memories collected in Ibo people tend to conflate the categories of slaves, freed slaves,[33] servants and *forros*;[34] who all worked for affluent families; the interviewees did not report memories of violent revolts of *libertos* or slaves nor the fact that *libertos* might have been marked with burning irons like in Angola (Neto, 2017, p. 4). Occasionally, a master or mistress could sanction the manumission of a slave through a celebration called *uri* in which the chosen slave was declared his/her own proper child (Declich, 2017, pp. 187-188). Some characteristics of the slaves status, however, stemmed talking about their activities. Among the worst things recalled in collective memories about the slaves are: first, the fact that slaves were *mandados*, i.e. "ordered to do", meaning that they did not decide themselves what to do and they had to follow orders; second, that they had to carry out menial work, including carrying chamber pots out of the *quintal* and all the cleaning. Personal slaves had to take care of all the needs of their master even the most unpleasant (Interview with Hawa Athumani, Ibo, 14 September 2013; Declich, 2017); third, that their personal names were not real names but almost jokes, phrases that marked their status as slaves. Some had names like: *Naona nani* (Who do you see?), *Jinalako* (What is your name?), *Awonanini* (Who can see?), *Avinammoja* (Does not have one), *Sina makosa* (Without

[33] The legal status of freed slave has changed over the time but did not mean becoming free in the same way as any other free born person.

[34] The *alforria* was a form of enfranchisement granted according to norms which changed over across the time.

fault), *Alcunha* (Interview with Ali Omari, Ibo, 15 November 2014; Ruben Osman, 11 September 2008).

But people called by those names kept living in the island and the surrounding areas at least until the Independence (1975) days. In Ibo island they lived together with other servants and they were all considered "people of the *quintal*"[35].

The laws on abolition of the end of the nineteenth century do not seem to have left traces in the memories. Most likely the laws mentioned earlier fostered that domestic slaves kept working for their master's previous families (Zamparoni, 2012). If people were considered "vagrant", they could be obliged to work by law, and be conscripted to forced labour of several kinds. Thus, the state guaranteed that Portuguese and/or the *moradores* could keep using local labour force. In March 1894 following an edict the *moradores* of Ibo requested *bilhetes de identidade*, i.e. identity tickets, for their black employees as a sort of certification which preserved them from being harassed and allowed their working activities and movements.[36]

In such a context, the fact of working for the former master (now patron), still shielded the servants from being conscripted to forced labour, often carried out in faraway estates and from being abused in those forced labour contexts. This was a deterrent against forced labour for men but abuses were still common and especially towards women. Patrons were responsible for defending their servants from what they considered abuses perpetrated by people external to the family. This appears clear from a case which came before the court of Ibo in 1920 concerning a twelve-year-old servant by the name of Muito Obrigada, namely "I thank you very much". As these kinds of names were only given to slaves, Muito Obrigada, having been born ca. 1908, should not have been called like a slave. Muito Obrigada was sent by her patron to fetch water from the well of a house and while doing so was raped. The rape was perpetrated most probably by the house owner who was never called to testify nor persecuted. The fact that her case came to court in 1920 suggests that her membership of a *quintal* granted her some sort of protection as her patron decided to take legal action[37].

It is not really known to what extent domestic slaves, and later servants, were badly treated in the homes and whether the treatment had radically changed over time, except that some court cases show that servants were sometimes abused. For instance, in 1907 the aforementioned eight-year-old António, who was mis-

[35] An analysis of this institution can be found elsewhere (Declich, 2015).

[36] AHM – Cabo Delgado – Governo do Distrito – Cx. 11 – 1894.

[37] AHM – Conselho de Cabo Delgado no Ibo, Juizo de Direito da Comarca, cx. 24, ano 1920, Auto-crime, n.º 462 (Thomaz, 2012, p. 193). Thomaz (2012, p. 193) suggests also that, apparently, cases concerning servants did not lead to real punishments for the abusers.

treated by the father-in-law of his patron, Jorge de Souza, ran away. Once he was found and brought back, Jorge de Souza beat him and he was found bleeding. Also his case was reported and ended up in court.[38]

In theory a servant should have been paid for the services; yet, there is not enough information on the extent to which this actually happened for most of the servants. There is, however, a court case from 1952 that indicates that even as late as the mid-twentieth century it was not unheard of a servant who himself did not expect any real payment. In 1952 Carlos, son of an old slave of a family, was still performing domestic service for the family in which he was born. During the court case for his divorce, the judges discovered that he had never been paid in cash, only in kind: he worked in exchange for food, clothes and shelter. The court sentenced the patron to pay all the arrears he was entitled to but, surprisingly, Carlos did not feel he had a right to receive the money and gave the amount back to his patron (Pereira, 1998, pp. 157-166, as cited in Thomaz, 2012, p. 188). His decision to return the money may have been motivated by any number of considerations – perhaps he was in debt to his patron, or he was the son of his patron – but the fact remains that he had not claimed a salary before the case came to court. Either he considered he was not entitled to a salary or he had been too afraid to ask for one.

If it is not clear whether domestic servants were, in fact, paid for their work, following the laws of 1878 and 1899 it is, however, certain that holding the status of servant, especially for males, entailed the important benefit of being shielded from recruitment as forced labour. This point was made by a slave woman's son who was born ca. 1940 and had worked and lived as a servant in a prosperous family in the area (Interview with Rubio Anli, Arimba, 7 August 2015. Also Hiahia Ngumati, Paquitequete, 24 August 2015, p. 3 retro).

A mix of memories

The way in collective memories in Ibo blend the domestic slave, *liberto*, and servant statuses suggests that the interviewees (who are not descendants of those who were sold away from Ibo or employed as indentured labourers) have not been left with a shared perception of a clear-cut change of status at the time the legislation transformed a large part of the slaves into *libertos* and thereafter into free people.

[38] AHM – Concelho de Cabo Delgado no Ibo, Juizo de Direito da Comarca, cx. 78, ano 1897, Auto-crime, n.º 283 (Thomaz, 2012, pp. 185-186).

In Ibo, at the end of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century, social relations between slaves, servants, and masters were of a particular kind. Servants developed special obligations and expectations within the *quintal* of their original master. Even when a servant was no longer working for the original owner, he or she maintained a relationship with the people of the *quintal* (Declich, 2015). This made the *quintal* a specific social space, granting a network of relationships, protection, but also entailing duties and obligations, even after abolition. De Vilhena makes mention of the children of slaves who, though free at the time of his observations, would nonetheless continue to carry out the orders of their mothers' former master (Vilhena, 1905, pp. 228-231).

A judicial case from Ibo in 1914 shows that a mistress attempted to defend her two female servants through another of her servants, Ametraque. Lady Tereza ordered Ametraque to punish some boys who had disturbed her two female servants who were swimming in the sea.[39] We cannot know if, in this case, the two female servants were also part of the family because, as mentioned earlier, they could have been daughters of her sons by a servant, and the offspring of those relationships could be included in the mistress' family. Such progeny, even if on occasions they were not considered full family members, could be assigned higher roles among the servants (Declich, 2017). However, although in the case mentioned we cannot be certain of the status of the two servants, it is significant that Lady Tereza was moved to intervene on their behalf. There are also cases of children born by a slave woman who were treated as the main offspring because the woman of the household could not bear children.[40] Therefore, belonging to a certain *quintal*, though it identified one as belonging to a social stratum that was considered inferior, nevertheless ensured access to a network of contacts which brought one into relationship with the wealthier echelons of society – a relationship that could be useful in later life, and therefore highly valued. Not all slaves could boast of having and making use of such a relationship; certainly, not the slaves who were brought from the hinterland for sale. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Ernesto Jardim de Vilhena reports the case – which he interprets as evidence of the persistence of slavery in the area – of a sailor who preferred to leave a paid job and commit himself to the unremunerated business of his mother's former owners (Vilhena, 1905, pp. 228-231). But the longer term relationships established in a *quintal* could explain why, even after the slavery abolition decrees, people of the *quintal* might find themselves in a position in

[39] AHM – Concelho de Cabo Delgado no Ibo, Juizo de Direito da Comarca, cx. 83, ano 1914, Auto-crime, s/n (Thomaz, 2012, p. 183).

[40] A man described his experience in an interview. He was even sent to school which was uncommon for black children (Interview with António Baptista, Ibo, September 2011).

which it was preferable to follow the previous owner in certain activities, even if it meant foregoing a salary for a while, rather than accepting short-term salaried employment with the Portuguese businessmen or officers, whose commitment to them would, most probably, cease right after the short term employment.

Conclusions

The unexpected memories of slavery in Ibo Island are clearly a by-product of other forms of labour exploitation and oppression as well as repression[41] of dissidence that were enforced more recently and which have been perceived and codified in collective memories as harsher than domestic slavery itself. This is apparent from the above-mentioned memories dwelling on dissidents, or alleged dissidents, being imprisoned and later killed at the SJB fort on Ibo. The collection of memories expressing this position is recalling the kind of slavery experienced in the domestic context of the *quintal* and regards the treatment reserved for people who worked for the owners in their own home. It has not been possible to find a reasonable sample of descendants of the slaves available for interviews living in the Makhwa territory. Descent from slavery is usually kept secret. The people interviewed claim that slaves have become part of the family. Moreover, the political changes fostered by the Independence gave opportunities to descendants from slaves who are sometimes wealthier in present days than the families of the earlier masters.

One conclusion to emerge compellingly is that in this specific social context the value people give to autonomy and freedom is closely bound up with questions of poverty, wealth, opportunities and the social networks available. Freedom is always related to some form of dependence, it is not its opposite. Dependence and its different forms never occur in a vacuum and are relative to what can be done otherwise in isolation. In the context of Ibo, evidently, where some wealth passed through the richer households, ties with the wealthy people could lead to a higher standard of living than disentanglement from dependency ties.

In the case I discussed of Ibo and the Querimbas, men who found themselves no longer of slave status, nor *libertos* obliged to work for some years for their previous masters, when free of ties to those previous owners were then conscripted to forced labour and had to endure the exploitation that entailed. The possibility of working with previous masters could be seen as a safer option than being left at the mercy of the Portuguese government which enforced recruitment of

[41] For some examples of dissidence repression see for instance Dhada (2020); West (2003).

so-called vagrants into labour which severely restricted their freedom of movements (Guthrie, 2016).[42]

For these reasons, memories of cruel treatment in the island are not be attached to slavery, which for the ancestors of some current inhabitants was slavery of a domestic kind, but to the most recent repression operated by the Portuguese government until the 1970s, recalled as a really negative experience. The present reassessment of the slavery imagery may also be related to the fact that after Independence, and following the 20/24 hours order,[43] most of the previous patrons had to leave Ibo (as well as the entire country) in a hurry and the local inhabitants basically stayed with or occupied the property left behind. Some of the dependents were entrusted with the care of their houses by the patrons. People can testify to the relevance of miscegenation and of the existence of families which included both black and white people, although those considered black members of the household and those deemed white did not enjoy the same status.[44] Thus, the present position of those Mozambican families who have "white" families in Portugal has come to be privileged, or at least holds some comparative advantages when set against African people who do not have "white" families in Europe. But again, having families in Europe denotes access to a larger network, which is what is valued. We do not know if collective memories would have seen slavery retrospectively as a relatively advantageous status if the previous patrons were still present in the island and if those considered vagrants had not been sent to forced labour during colonial times. Nowadays one kind of relationship between members of families residing in Europe and those in Africa is maintained, for instance, through the exchange of food: distant relatives in Africa are paid to send specific local foods to Europe where they are not otherwise available. Although people have occupied the stone houses of the previous inhabitants, the overall wealth in the island has not increased after the Portuguese left in the seventies. On the contrary, the standard of living seems to have declined markedly since 1974, at least in the perception of the inhabitants.

In conclusion, memories of slavery should prompt us to revise our own ideal of freedom when studying contexts pervaded by extreme poverty and structural violence in which interdependence and network are and have always been crucial for protection, survival, and to maintain a good quality of life.

[42] As mentioned by Guthrie, forced labour was not just compulsory work, it was also characterized by the requirement of residing six months on the plantation.

[43] This was an operation enforced in post-Independence Mozambique which obliged the Portuguese to leave in twenty-four hours with a 20 kg baggage allowance (and by carrying twenty kg of baggage) (Pitcher, 2002, p. 47).

[44] The concept of whiteness is historically constructed. As discussed elsewhere, at the end of the eighteenth century the wealth of a lineage or family was more valued than the perceived colour of the skin and the word *msungu*, nowadays used for "white", indicated rather a style of dressing and a wealth status (Declich, 2017).

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