Scents and tastes from a distant home: the transcontinental trajectories of a group of Goan families.

(Draft version, please do not quote)

Abstract

During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries a large number of Goans left their home country and migrated to Mozambique. This migration flux between the two Portuguese former colonies included a significant number of members of the local Goan elites converted to Catholicism. The “Catholic Brahmin families” formed a strong and deeply organized community that played a significant role in the configuration and administration of the Mozambican colonial society. After the independence, most of the Goan Catholic elite migrated to Portugal and other European and North American countries.

This paper reviews part of the outcome of a research project that, based both on the life narratives of a small group of families currently living in Lisbon (Portugal) and in the observation of their domestic consumption practices explored how this dimension can constitute a significant field to the understanding of these migrants trajectories across different cultural contexts like Goa, Mozambique and Portugal.

Although the research object of analysis included the material culture and consumption practices of both Mozambican and Portuguese homes, this paper addresses particularly the discussion of the data gathered on the subject of food preparation and consumption in the colonial context. Food, as it will be argued, turned out to be one of the
most significance themes used by the families to describe their daily lives and domestic routines in India and Africa making possible the emergence of significant features regarding their past and present contexts of integration and, therefore, contributing to highlight a series of dimensions transversal to all stages of their migration process.

**Introduction**

This paper constitutes part of the outcome of a research project regarding the life narratives of a group of Goan and a group of European families with a specific background: a long time (at least two generations) colonial experience in Mozambique that ended with a forced migration to Portugal during the independence process. Even though the subject of the “Portuguese Colonial Empire” has been object of intense study for the last two decades, there is little information regarding the everyday memories of life in the colony. The dominant common sense discourses on this matter make reference to the quality and the easiness of life “in the old days” but, besides the pictures of the long days at the beach, the hunting adventures in the jungle and the magnificent and memorable parties with hundreds of guests, there are not many considerations about the routines and patterns that marked the lives of millions of non-Africans in the Portuguese African colonies.

The research addressed the theme of “the colonial past” and the forms it marked the process of settlement and the present life in Portugal from a perspective that tried to highlight the discourses about the families’ daily-expected practices in Mozambique. In line with this objective, the home, its material culture and the majority of the domestic consumption practices were elected as the main object of study. This option is based on a series of theoretical assumptions that designate material culture and consumption practices as a vital expressive field (Douglas 1979; Bourdieu 1979; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1987) and the private domain of home as the key site for the understanding of the modalities used by

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1 Thought central to this research, the group of European families will not be addressed in this paper.
the subjects to actively appropriate objects and goods in order to produce meaning, establish social relationships and make sense of the broader context in which they live (Silverstone & Hirsch 1994; Gullestad 1995; Miller 2001). Besides contributing to guide the analysis towards the mundane realm of domestic tasks (doing the laundry, food preparation, everyday shopping, decorative options) and everyday routines, the option taken also established the conditions for the discussion of the “disintegration” and “reintegration” (Appadurai 1990; Rapport & Dawson 1998) moments involved in all migration movements, often marked by the unmaking of home and the making of a new one, as well as to the role played by objects and consumption practices in both processes. As Morley (2000) and Rapport & Dawson point out (1998), migrant homes are, most of the times, the places less subjected to external constraints imposed and, as such, are one of the best frameworks to the analysis and discussion of the migrants’ processes of evaluation, ordering and positioning in their new locations. Moreover, home is most likely one of the more significant sites for the expression of sentiments of loss (Morley 2000, Marcoux 2001, Miller 2008) and to articulate and manage memories and relationships from lost homes of the past (Marcoux 2001, Miller 2001, 2008). This theoretical perspective established the conditions to perceive the home as a congregation site of belonging and memory, ideals and affections, space and time, local and global, positive and negative representations of the world. A site that, by bringing together different types of resources, creates an original entity that goes beyond the sum of its parts, or, as Simmel (1984: 93-4)) acknowledged, an unique syntheses “an aspect of life and at the same time a special way of forming, reflecting and interrelating the totality of life”.

Although this paper does not cover the majority of the topics analysed during two years of fieldwork, it is relevant to state that this option was quite productive. Material culture and everyday consumption practices of past and present homes, proved to be fundamental to uncover some of the most significant aspects of these families life experiences and, therefore, constituted a positive contribution to the depiction of the colonial Mozambican experience from the perspective of this particular group and of its integration in the Portuguese contemporary society. While discussing family recipes and preparing tea in the kitchen, observing the fine linen, the handmade crafts or the dominant
decorative patterns present in the homes, it was possible to collect data that, even if centred on things, also helped to clarify significant aspects of collective life such as the models of inter-ethnic relationships in the colony, the dominant discourses about the Metropolis and Goa, the diverse perceptions about the war and the independence process, the first impressions about the Portuguese post-revolution society and the comments made about the present status of Mozambique.

Food preparation and consumption emerged from the range of material culture and domestic consumption practices addressed as on of its most expressive domains, not only because it was one of the families’ favourite themes when talking about their Goan, Mozambican and Portuguese experiences, but most significantly because all members directly contributed to its discussion. Although the family was the unit of analysis elected for the study, the assumption that, as Jackson & Moores (1995) and Fog Olwig (1998) persistently called our attention, within the physical bounds of home there is always room for different positions, not only regarding the exercise of authority and the management of collective economic resources, but also with respect to the division of domestic tasks, the emotional investments and the decision making processes made regarding its constitution and the maintenance, were confirmed. The subject of food become apparent, at first, precisely because it played a main part on the process of involving all family members in the study. This aspect was particularly relevant regarding men that, although were present in the first visits to the field, became more and more absent as the research increasingly focused on the domestic everyday routines. The second particularity evidenced by food consumption is of a subtler nature. As it will be showed, the colonization of Goa by the Portuguese introduced some specific trends with impact not only in the social life of the colony but also on its position in the empire as well as its relations with all the other colonial territories. Due to those specificities the positioning strategies (Hall 2003) taken by the Goan migrants in Mozambique, and specially by their catholic elites, were strongly marked by ambivalences that the analysis of domestic consumption practices, and particularly food consumption, helped to visualise, describe and contextualize in a productive manner, by working as a cultural resource that helped to establish a connection between an Indian origin, an African colonial past and an European present.
Colonial Goa

According to Sardo (2004), the Goan colonial society included a relatively vast and heterogeneous number of social categories resulting from the integration of three major factors: the Portuguese colonial policy, the imposed massive conversion to Catholicism and the encouragement of migration towards other European colonies. This complex system of social categorization knew various stages and designations during the long colonial period but was always constrained by two main groups: the Catholic Portuguese born in the metropolis and the Indians, integrating all non-catholic (Indus and Muslims) populations with no European descent. The social space “in between” was occupied by other categories integrating respectively, the Portuguese born in India, the descents of mixed marriages and the Indian population converted to Catholicism. This complex system was gradually subjected to revision and by the XIX century it was reduced to three categories: the Portuguese “os portugueses”, born in Portugal and that tended to return home after period of time in the colony, the Goans “os goeses”, born in Goa, regardless their religion, and the Descendents “os descendentes”, the Portuguese descents born in Goa and that did not tended to return to Portugal.

Besides this original social system, Colonial Goa maintained another categorization system that only applied to the Goan group – the Caste system. Even though the reasons why the Catholic Goan population kept the Caste system are still under debate, its significance is unquestioned and its structural principles were maintained regardless the loss of their religious foundations.

Due to a lack of administrative staff and military resources, the Portuguese authorities soon started to seek cooperation with the most powerful local groups as a way of controlling the territory and consolidate their colonial presence. The local elites, who were submitted to a rather brutal conversion process, saw this opportunity as the best way of maintaining its privileged positions. The cooperation between Goan Catholic elites and Portuguese authorities established the basis for a relational process that, though dictated by the colonisers, was basically controlled by the two parties.
One of the most expressive outcomes of this informal accord was the implementation of a “Portuguese way of life” in Goa. The movement started on the sixteenth century and consisted at first on the establishment of Catholic seminaries and schools, soon largely attended by the local elites. As a result of at, Konkani, the Goan local language was rapidly replaced by Portuguese as current language within the educated groups, and ended up being formally prohibited. Additionally, the Goan catholic elites were encouraged to change their original family names for Portuguese ones (usually the family name of their christening parents) and to integrate Portuguese cultural elements in the Goan music, poetry, cooking and dressing codes (the sari went out of use) as means of stating their embracement of a “western life style” (Thomaz 1998, Sardo 2004), as well as signal their privileged position in the new social order.

Despite the successful cooperation between Goan and Portuguese elites, during the XIX and the first part of the XX centuries, the first ones were strongly encouraged by the seconds to migrate, due to economic problems. Their main destinations were Bombay, Karachi, Calcutta and Mozambique, that was starting to be effectively occupied by the Portuguese and, therefore, in need of human resources to expand the territory administrative structures.

The Goan migration fluxes both to India and Africa included people from all castes and religious backgrounds as well as some Portuguese Descendents. This feature played an important part in the strategies developed by the Goan Catholic elite in Mozambique, since drawing their distances to the large contingent of other Goans was, according to the families, crucial to the groups’ position in the colony.

The diversity of the Goan migrant population in Mozambique contrasted with the uniformity found within the Catholic Brahmin segment. Most of the testimonies gathered about the theme are very similar both in its contents and characters:

“People only left Goa due to economic problems. Life could be very difficult because the oldest son inherited everything and the others nothing. Back then, Brahmin families were very large and many young men were forced to migrate in order to improve their lives.”

2 According to Gracias (2000: 425), in 1880 about 29,216 Goans left the territory. By 1910, their number had gone up to 47,334 and in 1935 around 38,788 Goan Catholics were absent from their homes.
Young single men, usually the youngest sons of a large number of siblings, mainly composed the first migrant generation. As members of the elites, most of these young men lacked economic capital but had high educational skills and had good knowledge of the colonial Portuguese policies, which made them, from the Mozambican power point of view, most welcomed due to the lack of qualified people in the territory. Furthermore, they spoke perfect Portuguese, were Catholic, had adopted Portuguese names and were familiarised with the “Portuguese way of life”, all factors that contributed to the beginning of a particularly positive relationship with the colonial elites. The large majority married women selected by the families in Goa, from the same caste and, within the families participating in the research, there is no evidence of mixed marriages in any of the generations.

The general characteristics briefly resumed here influenced the families’ integration in Mozambique, relationships with other groups, contacts with Goa and positions regarding the Metropolis, as well as the most trivial and ordinary daily aspects of their everyday lives.

This framework launched the basis to explore the material culture and domestic consumption practices of the families. Besides acknowledging the materialization of these cultural trends, the main concern during fieldwork was to establish the conditions to observe how objects and daily practices actively intervened in the consolidation of this cultural portrait in the domestic sphere. The adoption of a theoretical perspective promoting a concept of home as the result of a permanent creative process (Gullestad 1995; Miller 1997, 2001; Clarke 2001) established two of the most significant and productive guidelines during fieldwork. First, by defining home making as an ongoing activity, the concept introduces enduring dynamism to the process, while calling our attention to the centrality played by domestic material culture to the observation of social trajectories. Like Clarke (2001: 25) suggests, this perspective promotes the discussion of how “past and future trajectories (inseparable from external abstractions such as “class”) are integrated through fantasy and action, projection and interiorization” in the process of home making. Secondly, the concept also takes in consideration a fundamental feature of the subjects’ interactions with the material world: its creativity. The use of the term creativity to characterize the process of homemaking holds a double significance: it calls our attention to
the fact that, being an ongoing task, the production of home depends on the subjects capacities to transform, integrate and domesticate (Miller 2001) the objects and goods circulating in a given context, and, simultaneously, corresponds to the dominant formula used by the families while referring to this central activity.

In order to contextualize the statements on food consumption practices, let’s briefly start by summarise the most significant and recurrent information gathered about the Goan homes in Mozambique.

**Home Interiors: general decorative options, objects, major consumption patterns**

The most relevant aspect of the families’ general statements regarding their past homes is a note of ambivalence and a patent mimesis (Bhabha, 2002), both resulting from their particular position in the colonial social structure, suggesting the existence of a particular Goan Brahmin Catholic *habitus* (Bourdieu 1979).

“We lived in a very good neighbourhood and had a very cordial relationship with our (Portuguese) neighbours. Our daily routines were similar to theirs. Well, as you know, we all had a western upbringing. (...) We are educated people, with a certain *pose*”.

“ My parents owned and used almost exclusively Goan objects, specially furniture (...). People used Goan furniture, not out of necessity, but because they really treasured it. These were objects that belonged to the families for ages”.

These examples illustrate well the main statements about the families’ African homes. Even if there were cases where the Goan objects were dominant, most homes adopted European styles, like the ones in use in the neighbouring homes. Nevertheless, it is relevant to observe that even in the homes where the European decorative trend prevailed, there is no evidence of devaluation or depreciation of Goan objects, which may indicate the existence of specific reasons to justify their absence. Although all families strongly insisted in stressing
the existing resemblances between their homes and the homes of the Portuguese witch, in their opinion, confirmed their exclusive social position in the colony, the fact is that this statements never implied a negative appreciation of Goan related objects and consumption patterns.

The second significant feature about the families’ decorative options in Africa concerns African objects or, to be more precise, objects associated by the subjects to the indigenous cultures. The following statement illustrates the most noteworthy note:

“There were not many African objects in my parents home. They were so ordinary that we did not look at them twice. They were not valued and (...) that was usual”.

Even though this account does not indicate a clear depreciative evaluation the fact is, when compared with the ones of European or Goan design and origin, the “African Objects”, as their were always designated by the families, formed to a different category of things. This last observation leads to a final remark concerning the discursive modalities used to describe the objects and decorative trends of the home. Like in the case of the “African Objects”, the most standard formula used to describe the European objects present in the home was exactly that of “European objects”. This generalist designation includes a large diversity of things, from furniture to decorative objects, clothing and china, forming a pattern where, the quality “European” prevails above all singularities. The same does not occur concerning the objects generally designated as “Goans”. The statements became more precise, different categories of objects are portrayed in specific manners and their biographies carefully explained, especially regarding the objects directly connected with the family homes in Goa.

**Food, Music and family stories**

“In Africa, my mother used to cook Goan food most days. She was an excellent cook and really enjoyed cooking. To be honest, I think that food is my “umbilical cord” to Goa. And I think I can say the same for many of my friends”.
This excerpt illustrates quite well the families’ dominant discourses about the issue of domestic food consumption. Although most of the women did not cook because they had “lots of help from the domestic staff” all mention the importance of training their local servants to properly prepare Goan food. With the exception of one case, and even if “European” or “Portuguese” food were also daily present in their homes, the tastes and smells of the Goan cuisine are, without doubts, the most celebrated ones. The evidence of the importance of food in the management of the families’ relation to origin illustrated by its positive evaluation is further emphasized by comparison with the ambiguity and vagueness of the discourses regarding the other fields of material culture and domestic consumption analysed. For the first time regarding their colonial experiences it is made clear that these families had a distinct background of their Portuguese neighbours.

From the vast material gathered, two ideas become in evidence: the first states deexistence of a positive evaluation of Goan food towards any other culinary tradition even the Portuguese that, although also present in the family meals was “adapted to the Goan way”; The second calls attention to the fact that food was the first subject employed by the families to openly talk about their cultural backgrounds without pointing its “proximity and resembling” with the Portuguese colonial culture and, also that, although not being the only “Goan tradition” kept by the families, always played a significant part in the its materialization processes.

As was stated before, the Portuguese colonial presence in Goa affected many dimensions of cultural and social life. The process of “cultural proximity” of the converted populations to the Portuguese ways of living also marked Goan cuisine, but in an original way:

“We, the Goans, we know how to give a Goan flavour to all Portuguese meals. And we always did it. Those meals become much better after “we worked them”. The adaptations we have made of traditional Portuguese cooking traditions! They are really extraordinary”.
This process of meaningful revision was almost always made thru the use of spices, the key ingredient to, in the families’ words, translate the taste of Portuguese food into a more “proper” one. This adjustment processes were constant, varied and applied to meat, fish and vegetables, with only three major exceptions, exactly the ones that one could say correspond to the most disseminated of the Portuguese popular food patrimony: dried cod, sardines and grilled chicken. These are, however, clearly devaluated when compared with Goan food and described as “normal food”, “children food” or “rapid food”.

The second significant aspect was introduced when discussing the existence of relevant distinctions between everyday meals and festive meals. The dominant discourse reveals that, independently of the cultural background of the guests, both formal and family festive meals were composed exclusively by Goan food.

“On festive days it was unthinkable not to prepare proper Goan food. Our patrimony is so rich and exquisite that there were lots and lots of recipes to prepare, all mandatory: pullau, sarapatel, bebincas, halvá, that my mother knew how to bake so well and I do also, you need to mix wheat semolina, almonds, coconut milk and sugar. It’s so light and perfect! It is all covered with almonds! In fact, I think we do have the most extraordinary food patrimony and on festive days it was mandatory.”

Like most of Goan cultural trends, most of Goan food suffered the influences not only of the direct Portuguese presence but also indirectly from other Portuguese colonies in the Indic, especially from Malacca. According to Thomaz (2004:17-18), the “Goan cuisine” results from the mixing of Indian influences, especially regarding food preparation and cooking techniques and processes, the use of a large variety of spices and the abundant sauce of most recipes, and direct and indirect Portuguese influences, being the most relevant the introduction of beef and pork, the use of animal blood in recipes and also of fermented beverages. Being aware of these influences, and in particular of the Portuguese ones, the families chose to openly refer to the uniqueness and richness of their “own patrimony and

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3 Rice cooked with almonds, raisins, fried onion and chicken.
4 Traditional Christmas Goan recipe: pork meat cooked on the animals’ blood, strongly spiced with black pepper, ginger, red pepper, cumin, tamarind and Indian saffron.
5 Cake made of eggs, sugar, flour, butter and coconut.
"traditions" for the first time and in contrast with other elements of the same patrimony like language or dress codes.

This particularity becomes even more evident concerning another aspect of Mozambican popular culture, the custom of cooking curry for lunch all Sundays. This practice is, if not the most, one of the more relevant food issues for all the families interviewed during research for the reason that curry is identified as one key element of colonial Mozambicans’ collective identity. Regardless ethnic belonging, class, gender or generation, everybody elected curry as one of the most significant collective symbols for all Mozambicans, especially in the past but also in the present days. Although curry was prepared with different ingredients according to the different groups (Europeans privileged crab and lobster, Goans tended to prefer meat and crab and the local populations shrimp, the least expensive ingredient), the fact is that, according to an interviewee “on Sunday, you could sense the smell of curry in every street of Maputo. It was one of the few things that bought people together”. Although there is a vivid discussion about who is responsible for the introduction of Mozambican “national food” in the territory, the fact is that all families claim that the Goans are responsible for that. Again contradicting the dominant note about their proximity to the colonial elites, the families declared “regarding curry, it was them who imitated us. They (the Europeans) did not know how to cook it. They used a powder, a mix of spices that they bought in an Indian store. And that is not the way to do it. They did not know how to “work” with our spices.”

Via food the discussion of material culture and domestic consumption practices took another path, introducing complexity and diversity to a subject that, at first, seem to present as its main characteristic an expression of the groups position in the colonial structure. As one of the informants stated, being a Catholic Goan Brahmin was quite complex at those times because it implied to manage a leading position within both the Goan and the Indian communities present in the territory, but also with the Europeans and the local populations:

“We never had the courage to assume our Indian ancestry, that is why we do not even know how to speak the language. On those days (before independence) it was shameful do speak concani, at least to the higher
castes. Our parents never talked about our Indian roots, just about Goa (the Goa influenced by the Portuguese). The women did not wear saris, especially after the invasion of Goa by India. To wear a sari meant not to be Portuguese. God forbid! We did not want anyone to see us like monhés. That would be disastrous!

The strategy to cope with this demanding strategy was to, albeit all the disruptions introduced by migration (Hall, 2003), reinforce many of their distinctive collective identity features and adjust others to the new context. Regarding the material culture and domestic consumption practices Goan food, and secondly music and oral and written family stories gained a particularly significant part in the materialization of a picture that, at first seemed to portray these families a positive example of a colonial policy that, in words of Bhabha (2002: 86) desired “for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite”.

Music and literature played a very significant part of these families’ life experiences since childhood. Being one of the most distinctive features of their specific cultural capital, the valorisation of these cultural consumptions has, according to the families, its roots in Goa and where were integrated in the education of Brahmin people. In Mozambique both activities were part of the daily routines and of festive occasions. All family members attended music lessons and it was usual to organise musical moments on special occasions. Literature was also part of the families’ daily routines. Like music, all forms of literature were regarded has key elements on the upbringing of the young generations, witch made books one of the most treasured domestic objects. Though similar in relevance, these two cultural fields presented quite different characteristics and contents:

“The most exclusive literature was, of course, the Portuguese classics. Our authors! We had, no doubts about it, a very Portuguese education, strongly linked to the Portuguese culture. It was a quite formal upbringing, my parents were very strict regarding the knowledge of the Portuguese culture.”

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6 Popular negative form of designation of all Indian populations in the Portuguese African colonies. Due to its privileged position in the colony, Catholic Goans were not named monhés.
“I always knew Goan music, since I was a little child. My father used to play in a music band, classical European music. But then he had this smaller group and they used to get together and play mandô. I grew up with that music.”

Both sentences illustrate the existence of a clear differentiation between musical and literary consumptions. Even if it is clear that, from a formal point of view, the subjects had a western musical and literary education, at home or in small Goan groups and cultural associations they have also learned and played Goan music. Even if not in an almost exclusive manner like in the case of food, it is possible to state that Goan music was considered relevant to the families, especially in festive occasions. Most families remember playing and singing the mandós during birthday parties, Christmas and other festive occasions. As for reading practices, and maybe due to the fact that all subjects attended Portuguese Schools and the use of concani was forbidden at home, they were limited to a small part of the literary resources in the colony: the Portuguese classics approved by the political regime. This lack of literary contact with Goa was, however, replaced by an intense practice of family story telling:

“Mother used to tell us many stories about her childhood in Goa. All the stories were very beautiful because they talked about the friendship and community spirit that united all family. I think that some of my connection to Goa comes from those stories. It was from them that I learned how life was back there and the meaning of family. We used to dream about those fantastic stories.”

Like Goan food and music, this activity used to take place also during festive occasions within the home and so the families know not only their family stories but also the stories of most of the elite families. This particularity gives family stories an additional task besides contributing for “cultural continuance”, it makes them responsible for the informal circulation of knowledge about the other Brahmin Catholic families since childhood and therefore contributing for the “naturalization” of tactic of great closeness in the management of the Catholic Brahmin community.

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7 Goan Brahmin musical and dance genre.
Final Remarks

The discussions with the families about their past African homes contributed not only to a more complete description and understanding of an aspect of the Portuguese recent colonial period but also called the attention to the necessity of questioning the dominant pictures that portray Goan elites as one of the most representative cases of “mimetic colonialism” (Bhabha, 2002) of the former Portuguese Empire.

At first, the depictions of these families’ daily domestic routines clearly pointed to the existence of a dominant modality characterized by the “proximity to the Portuguese way of life”. Though significantly restructured due to migration, the reproduction of this dominant modality, can be understood as one original expression of the cultural process started long ago in Goa and responsible for what Sardo (2004) defines as “the uniqueness of Goan Identity”. More close to the Portuguese than any other non-European group in a more hostile context than origin regarding race and ethnicity, the Goan elites chose to intensify in public their knowledge and positive reception of the Portuguese culture by abandoning ethnic elements like their original language or the sari. This strategy also prevented the group from being perceived as “just one more Indian group” from other region and/or religion and caste. As mentioned before, most subjects mentioned that their mothers, who actively promoted friendship with other children from the same “kind of families”, had as one of their major concerns “that we only met people with the same level of education and with a similar lifestyle”. This meant that, except for the Portuguese, the group cultivated a distanced relationship with all others, including the other Goans from lower castes.

The investment on producing and displaying a “proper Portuguese home in Africa” is, however, complemented by the maintenance and integration of a set of domestic consumption practices directly connected to Goa and highly valued. The fact that, despite their “portugalidade” the families choose to maintain and pass to the next generations some aspects of their Goan patrimony and elect the home as the key context to do it reinforces all the assertions that have been pointing the private domain of the home as a central anthropological terrain to the understanding of contemporary lives. Like Short (1999) summarized, home proved to be “A key site in the social organization of space. It is
where space becomes place and where family relations and gendered and class identities are negotiated, contested and transformed. The home is a an active moment in both time and space in the creation of identity, social relations and collective meaning.” (1999: x).

Similar to the cases examined by Clarke (2001), Fortier (2000), Morley (2000), Miller (2008) and many others, the centrality of the home as a particularly expressive domain in migration circumstances proved its significance by setting the conditions to a private display of “goanidade” that didn’t endangered their public position. And food was one of the most significant cultural resources to materialise this process.

The first significant aspect about the topic of food consumption is its centrality in the discourses of the past. Food was, as was mentioned before, one of the items described more intensively and, unlike other domestic consumption practices, most of the memories directly and indirectly associated with it were depicted with accuracy and detail. More than any other specific consumption practice, food marks its presence in the discourses of all family members, constituting a key topic about the memories of the past. In “Remembrance of Repasts”, Sutton (2001: 6) argues that the “ability of food to generate subjective commentary and encode powerful meanings would seemingly make it ideal to wed to the topic of memory”. Though this research did not have memory as its primary focus and consequently can not contribute directly to the authors’ most interesting discussion about the principles underlying his positions about the significance of food in the constituency of memory, this assumption proved accurate.

Secondly, the importance of food also emerged from the fact that it introduced an innovative and more complex dimension concerning the families’ relation to origin. Even if other material culture and domestic consumption practices evidenced the existence of a particularly tense situation regarding the links to Goa, food practices and its centrality in the memories of the past, made it particularly clear. The ambivalence noted in the families’ descriptions of their positioning strategies in the colony became more evident. The fact that all families stressed that their homes could be easy taken by Portuguese homes, not only because of their location, but also because they organized, decorated and managed them according to the “Portuguese way of living” is clearly a dominant statement only to be openly contradicted by the topic of food. Goan food, properly prepared according to the
families’ recipes, is served both on everyday meals and festive occasions. Although domestic, the display of “Goanidade”, an identity element clearly not European, was understood by the families as one of the most significant tools to maintain a meaningful connection to origin. Though not original, since there are many examples of the relevance of food in this domain, it acquires a special relevance in this case since it defies the dominant trend towards the integration and naturalization of a “Portuguese domesticity” Glover (2004) that, even if based on their former colonial experience in Goa, marked with great intensity their daily lives in Mozambique.

The last significant note regarding food consumption is closely connected with the second and calls the attention to an originality regarding the families’ position in the colonial social structure. It was stated that one of the main reasons of justification for the privileged position occupied by the group was its cultural “proximity to the Portuguese” and its positive evaluation of the “Portuguese Culture”. From all the items and domestic practices analysed, Goan food was the only one that was referenced as better than the Portuguese. More, even the Portuguese acknowledge it since, according to the families, they imitated the Goan cuisine by introducing curry dishes in their domestic meals and elected a Goan recipe – curry, to be “the national Mozambican food”. The discourses indicating a strategic display of a distinctive habitus (Bourdieu, 1979) and the efforts in maintaining a proper Portuguese home in Africa experience an inflection on this particular subject. Goan cuisine is not only considered “Goan” and “ours”, despite all its Portuguese influences, but also better than the ordinary Portuguese food and therefore carefully maintained to the present days, fulfilling its role of cultural “umbilical cord to God”, as one of the subjects spontaneously and significantly defined it.
References


