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The Aftermath of Slavery in São Tomé and Príncipe

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The *curadorias dos serviçais e colonos* were important institutions during Portuguese colonialism in the 19th and 20th centuries. With minor differences in their design, these institutions existed throughout Portuguese domains in Africa, namely Angola, Cape Verde, Portuguese Guinea, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The main function of the *curadorias* was to manage African labour; after the abolition of slavery the colonial administration had to conclude labour contracts with the local population in the territories under its rule. Thus, the history of the *curadorias* is intertwined with attempts to create a hired labour force in Africa. It is important to highlight that an awareness of the entanglements between law and labour facilitates a better understanding of the complexities surrounding the legal status and experiences of hired *serviçais* (servants).

Maria Nazaré de Ceita's book, *A curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos (S. Tomé e Príncipe 1875/1926)*, uses a case study of the São Tomé archipelago to demonstrate how central the *curadorias* were to colonialism. The book, published in April 2021, results from the author's master's dissertation, *Para uma história da Curadoria Geral dos Serviçais e Colonos de S. Tomé e Príncipe (1875–1926)*, defended in 2006 at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon.

Ceita's study is the first time an author proposes to discuss the relevance of *curadorias* in the colonial experience of the Portuguese Empire. Ceita's book tackles the challenge of connecting scattered discussions in the bibliography and analysing often unpublished historical sources about *curadorias*. These sources comprise documentation from the *curadorias* themselves such as reports, correspondence, notices, and lists of labourers. The author also analyses reports from governors, denouncements of working conditions, bulletins, newspapers, legislation, and interviews with former employees

and labourers. The diversity of sources underscores the importance of consulting not only Portuguese archives, but also local records. At the Historical Archive of São Tomé and Príncipe, Ceita was able to consult unique sources that helped answer her research questions. This bibliography is wide-ranging and fulfils the objective of demonstrating the archipelago's place in the Portuguese Empire; unfortunately, though, it does not include the bibliographical production produced from 2006 onwards.

Besides the introduction and conclusion, the book is divided into three parts, each with two chapters. In the first part, *A criação da curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos no cenário colonial do arquipélago*, Chapter 1, *Génese e institucionalização da curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos*, Ceita sets the context of how the *curadorias* were established in the archipelago. At the same time, tensions between former slaves and masters intensified, and the gradual process of abolishing slavery subjected the captive population to private and public tutelage. With the abolition, the former slaves refused to perform contract labour and abandoned their employers, who in many cases had been their masters. The creation of the *curadoria* and the new duties of the *curadores* were primarily aimed at mediating the difficult labour relations on the islands. The author then dedicates Chapter 2, *A curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos: legislação, demografia e poder colonial*, to discussing the centrality of legislation in labour policies. Another important aspect of the chapter is a brief presentation of the *curadorias'* relations with the county administration, the police, the provincial governor, the local labour board, the secretary general of the government, the employers, and the indigenous population. A section describing the relations of the *serviçais* to the curator, which unfortunately the author did not include, could give us some clues to

* MARIA NAZARÉ DE CEITA, *A curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos (S. Tomé e Príncipe 1875/1926)*, Lisboa: Novembro 2021, 226 p., ISBN 978-989-54984-4-4

understand whether the *serviçais* understood the curator as a mediator of labour relations.

In the second part of the book, *Inventário e estudo das funções da curadoria geral dos serviçais e colonos e das suas repercussões sociais*, Chapter 3, *A curadoria: funções legais e formas de funcionamento*, Ceita analyses the legal and administrative functions of the *curadorias*. She points out that even though it was carried out by free labourers, contract labour involved some level of coercion, whether in recruitment, transportation, daily work, or in re-hiring. Police surveillance and violence were constant in the lives of the workers. In Chapter 4, *A curadoria, população autóctone e os contratados*, Ceita then discusses the process of land concentration on the islands. The local population struggled to maintain their properties in the face of the advancing European landowners. The author points out that the expropriations were frequently unduly assisted by the local authorities. In addition to land control, the archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe also practiced a tight control over vagrancy. The hired *serviçais* who ran away from their employers were considered to be vagrants, but equally so was the local population of the islands.

The third and last part, *A companhia Ilha do Príncipe / Roça Água Izé: Estudo de caso*, contains an analysis of life on the plantations, taking as an example Roça Água Izé, an important property whose first owner was directly involved in discussions about the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and the emancipation of slaves. João Maria de Sousa e Almeida was one of the driving forces of cocoa production in the archipelago. In Chapter 5, *Água Izé: criação, organização e expansão de uma unidade de produção centrada no cacau*, Ceita shows that the Sousa e Almeida estate, which at certain times was the largest cocoa exporter in the archipelago, had almost 3,000 hired workers. The data on wages and high mortality of workers, for example, allow conclusions about the process of wealth generation on the islands. This makes the theme of the exploitation of *serviçais* stand out even more. The last chapter, *O quotidiano da roça: »o tocar do sino«: do acordar ao adormecer – o quotidiano da roça através dos depoimentos orais*, draws attention to a type of sources little explored in the history of law: oral sources. The analysis of both oral and

written sources allows the discussion of specific aspects of the relations between *serviçais* and *curadorias*. From the testimonies of former employees, the historian presents information about the tasks of the *curadorias*, the supervision of working conditions, corporal punishment, and the relations between European and African employees within the *curadoria*, for example. From the testimonies of the *serviçais*, the historian discusses aspects of recruitment, working conditions, and contacts with the *curadorias*. It is interesting how Ceita shows that one of the former *serviçais* was sent to São Tomé to pay off his family's debts in Angola.

This study is a significant contribution to legal history and, equally, to labour history. It demonstrates how *curadorias* were fundamental to the contract labour system in the Portuguese Empire. One dimension little explored by Ceita concerns the importance of the *curadoria* as a court. The curators had the power to adjudicate on labour issues through summary lawsuits. These lawsuits enable the scholar to understand what the expectations of employers and *serviçais* were regarding labour contracts, and it emerges that the *serviçais* fought to maintain their conditions as free labourers despite the employers' attempts. The book *Alma Negra: Depoimento sobre a questão dos Serviçais de S. Tomé*, attributed to a curator of the Island of Príncipe, presents accounts of what appear to be the *serviçais* themselves about their living and working conditions, but the author does not analyse these statements. Undeniably, the *curadorias* were often on the side of the employers; however, as it is possible to observe in many lawsuits, the *curadorias* also investigated complaints and enforced labour regulations that were contrary to the interests of the employers and colonial authorities. The lawsuits of the *curadorias* allow us to explore even the contradictions that surrounded the institution and the pressure that the workers themselves exerted.

Maria Nazaré de Ceita's book is much more than mere presentation of information about the history of the archipelago of São Tomé and Príncipe. It presents an analysis of labour relations, the hired labour system, legal statutes, and colonialism as an aftermath of slavery in the Atlantic world. ■