



Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y
Arqueología

ISSN: 1900-5407

antipoda@uniandes.edu.co

Universidad de Los Andes
Colombia

Kenny, Mary Lorena
Making Heritage in Brazilian Quilombos
Antípoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología, núm. 12, enero-junio, 2011, pp. 91-111
Universidad de Los Andes
Bogotá, Colombia

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=81422437006>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in redalyc.org

redalyc.org

Scientific Information System
Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal
Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

MAKING HERITAGE IN BRAZILIAN QUILOMBOS

MARY LORENA KENNY*

kennym@easternct.edu

Eastern Connecticut State University

Department of Sociology and Anthropology

ABSTRACT The Brazilian Palmares Cultural Foundation has recognized 1,624 communities as remanescentes de quilombos, or remnants, of traditional Black settlements. Since 1988, the constitution has guaranteed these groups collective land titles, generating heated debate and conflict concerning authenticity, assimilation, and land rights. Heritage has become an important vehicle for legitimizing identity and securing territory rights. I examine quilombola heritage in the sertão, an area not popularly acknowledged as having a history of slavery or Afro Brazilian cultural traditions.

KEY WORDS:

Brazil, Heritage, Quilombos, Memory, Sertão.

91

* Ph.D., Columbia University, United States of America.

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE PATRIMONIO EN LOS QUILOMBOS BRASILEÑOS

RESUMEN La Fundación Cultural Palmares de Brasil ha reconocido a 1,624 comunidades como “remanescentes de quilombos” o restos de las colonias negras tradicionales. Desde 1988 la constitución la garantiza a estos grupos títulos colectivos sobre las tierras, generando un fuerte debate y conflicto con respecto a la autenticidad, asimilación y derechos sobre la tierra. El patrimonio se ha convertido en un vehículo importante para la legitimización de la identidad y la garantía de los derechos territoriales. En el presente artículo se examina la herencia quilomba en el sertão, un área no popularmente reconocida por su historia de esclavitud o por su tradición cultural afro-brasilera.

PALABRAS CLAVE:

Brasil, patrimonio, quilombos, memoria, sertão.

A CONSTRUÇÃO DO PATRIMÔNIO NOS QUILOMBOS BRASILEIROS

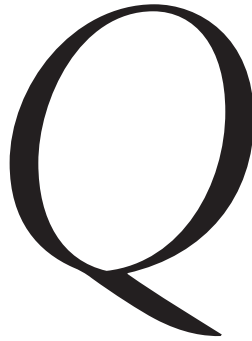
RESUMO A Fundação Cultural Palmares do Brasil reconheceu 1624 comunidades como “remanescentes de quilombos” ou restos das colônias negras tradicionais. Desde 1988 a constituição garante a estes grupos títulos coletivos sobre as terras, gerando um forte debate e conflito em quanto à autenticidade, assimilação e direitos sobre a terra. O patrimônio tem se convertido em um veículo importante para a legitimação da identidade e a garantia dos direitos territoriais. No presente artigo se examina a herança quilombola no sertão, uma área não popularmente reconhecida por sua história de escravidão ou por sua tradição cultural afro-brasileira.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE:

Brasil, patrimônio, quilombos, memória, sertão.

MAKING HERITAGE IN BRAZILIAN QUILOMBOS

MARY LORENA KENNY



QUILOMBOLAS, OR REMANESCENTES

DE QUILOMBOS, are federally recognized descendents (or 'remnants') of settlements of self-

liberated slaves (Whitten, Jr. and Torres, 1998: 16-17). There are an estimated 4,000 quilombo descendant communities in Brazil, and as of May 2011, the Palmares Cultural Foundation (FCP) has recognized 1,624. Since 1988, the constitution has guaranteed these groups collective land titles as a type of reparation and ethnically based land reform (Arruti, 2006: 90).¹ In some areas, claims to land as quilombolas have generated heated debates, charges of racism, and violent conflict.²

Since 1988 the federal constitution (article 216, no. 5, par 5) recognizes quilombo remnant communities as national heritage (*patrimônio*).³ Heritage is often thought of as 'natural,' as being grounded in historical facts and shared meanings, which are reflected in tangible (material) objects and in non-tangible (oral, embodied) memories. These shared meanings are crucial to the maintenance and practice (communication) of identity. However the meaning, experiences, and memories associated with the past, including the material past, are always heterogeneous and contested. Rather than reflecting the past, something *becomes* heritage through cultural and political production. In other words, the past is always imbued with contemporary political, social, and discursive meanings (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2006; Lowenthal, 1998).

1 A certificate from the Fundação Cultural Palmares (FCP) acknowledging a group as a quilombo descendant community is the first step in petitioning for demarcation of land and gaining access to communal land titles.

2 In many locations the granting of land titles, one hundred and twenty years after the end of slavery, is corralled by violent land disputes and conflicts with *grileiros* (those with illegal land holdings (Hammond, 2009: 164).

3 Since 2003, official heritage policy has expanded beyond the memories and perspectives of elites, long dominated by the aesthetic and material signatures of colonial power (Portuguese, Catholics, plantation owners, etc) in the states of Bahia, Pernambuco, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro.

In this article, I attempt to outline how quilombola heritage policies are understood in a two communities that share overlapping family networks in the semi-arid rural interior, or *sertão*, of the Brazilian northeastern state of Paraíba. Serra do Talhado was recognized by the FCP as a quilombo remnant community on June 4, 2004. It is located twenty-six kilometers up a steep and difficult to access mountain and today is comprised of about 120 inhabitants. About a year later, on July 12, 2005, its urban 'extension,' comprised of about 125 families who migrated from mountain location of Talhado to the neighborhood of São José on the periphery of the town center, received a certificate of recognition. Until recently, a public ethos of cultural unity and the absence of racially or culturally distinct experiences defined and legitimized how local culture was understood and commemorated. The recent emergence of a separate 'quilombola' heritage, however, is challenging this common-sense notion.

Talhado heritage is manifested primarily in collective and spatial memory as 'settlers,' and through their production of pottery. However, since federal recognition in 2004, celebrations, performances, material or other forms of cultural expression are increasingly reflecting Black activist discourse concerning racial discrimination and multicultural citizenship (Escobar, 2008). As federal recognition is partly based on customary ties to place within a socio-political context of *spatial and racial exclusion*, race is becoming a 'louder' idiom for organizing and expressing social, political, cultural, and spatial life. The geo-imaginary of quilombos further outlines the contents of quilombola heritage, as quilombo descent communities are mapped as symbols of 'resistance' - to slavery, colonialism, capitalism, assimilation, globalization, and whitening.

I outline briefly the history of quilombo heritage policies and focus on some of the tensions associated with a heritage policy in which ethnic land restitution is used as a land reform strategy. These tensions reveal why 'taking on' (*assumir*) quilombola ethnic identity and the production of quilombola heritage is fraught with ideological differences and local skepticism concerning the symbolic, political, and economic benefits of being recognized as national patrimony.

QUILOMBOLA HERITAGE POLICIES

An assemblage of social, economic, and political conditions have come together to make a 'quilombo heritage' relevant for those living in rural black communities (Barth 1998: 14; Lovejoy 2006: 98). This heritage draws from the narratives, symbols, and practices of Black activists, human rights discourse, and new federal policies on land restitution and multiculturalism.

By the mid 1970s, following a 20-year military dictatorship, new social actors began to reconfigure the cultural, social and economic rights of the

‘excluded’ (Blacks, Indigenous peoples, riverine dwellers, gypsies, rubber tappers, gays and lesbians, religious groups). The *luta*, or struggle for social, economic, and political rights, was concretized in the 1988 constitution, which extends equal rights and protections to all. The ethnoracial category and entitlements to land for *remanescentes de quilombos* emerged from this rights discourse. Activists were also successful in inserting articles 215 and 216 (section 2) into the 1988 constitution which officially recognized the contribution of ‘Black groups’ in the nation’s heritage.

At the time of the ruling in 1988, however, there were no procedures for the implementation of the decree, nor was there consensus on an operational definition of ‘quilombo descendants.’ Although the Fundação Cultural Palmares (FCP), under the Ministry of Culture, evaluated petitions for federal recognition as a quilombo descendent community, they did not have the technical, financial, or legal expertise to address demarcation, delimiting, and titling of land, or the means to deal with the tension and conflicts that emerged from the application of entitlement.

The National Association of Quilombo Descent Communities addressed this issue in 1995 at their first national conference in Brasília. Lawyers, anthropologists, historians, land reform activists, and representatives from the *Movimento Negro Unificado Contra Discriminação Racial* (MNUCDR or MNU), the Black activist movement, came together to debate and formulate a standardized definition of contemporary ‘neo-quilombos’ (Price, 1998: 250). Black activists sympathies with struggles for social justice argued in favor of a ‘resistance’ model, which in many ways was a limited and static definition applied to rural black settlements. Referred to as the ‘endangered species’ definition, only those who could prove a genealogical tie to maroons would be considered quilombolas. Others argued for a more subjective and dynamic definition that would take into account contemporary social conditions, especially the need for land reform in rural black communities. As Arruti has argued, these communities were not ‘frozen’ in the past, anchored to specific locations, or excised from the profound political, social, and ecological forces that have shaped change in Brazil (1997: 27). It was misguided to evaluate contemporary rural black communities according to concepts based on quilombos of 300 years ago (communities of ‘resistance’ exhibiting unchanged cultural content), such as Palmares.⁴

In the end, ‘common land use’ as a cultural tradition was determined as a key variable in operationalizing ‘quilombola.’ At the same time, the *Instituto*

4 One of the largest, and long-lasting, quilombos was Palmares, a diverse settlement located in what is now the state of Alagoas. Formed in the 17th century, Palmares was comprised of nine small villages that developed considerable food production, housing, and a complex social organization, with an estimated population that grew to about 20,000. Called “Little Angola,” (Landers, 2005: 178), it survived numerous military sieges for almost a hundred years (1597-1695). It continues today to be seen as an icon of resistance, organization, and military strength (Arruti, 2006: 73).

Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária, National Institute for Agrarian Reform or INCRA, linked to the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), began working with the FCP, and state land agencies, to standardize procedures for demarcation and granting of land titles. Soon after, a number of communities began to mobilize as quilombo descendents, and within a few years 3 communities received collective land titles (Price, 1998: 243). Years later, on September 10, 2001, then president Fernando Henrique Cardoso outlined the definition and administrative processes for the titling of quilombo descendent communities. According to decree 3912, *only communities occupied by quilombolas in 1888 (the end of slavery) and continued to be occupied by their descendents in October 1988 (the new constitution) would be have the right to land titles.*

As Arruti points out, the state was criticized for engaging in 'ethnic administration' and bureaucratizing 'who they are' (1997: 17). Expert reports (*laudos*) written by anthropologists were based on pre-conceived templates that determined whether sufficient 'evidence' was present that one was a 'leftover' from slavery through ancestry, blood ties, African origin, or cultural traditions (Almeida, 2002: 77). Competing narratives continued to fuel skepticism concerning the validity of quilombola ethnicity and entitlement to land. For those who ascribed to a social constructivist notion of ethnicity, the template ignored the historical, local and macro-level processes that shape how ethnic identity was conceptualized and practiced. Those who held a more essentialist notion felt there was insufficient 'difference' to be acknowledged as quilombolas.

What followed was a radical 'resemantization' of what it meant to be a maroon descendent (Almeida, 1996; Gomes, 1996; Arruti, 1997; O'Dwyer, 2002). Advocates argued that the criteria requiring 'proof' of quilombo ancestry was the equivalent of putting a 'straight jacket' onto Black history, as survival often required movement and invisibility (Almeida, 2002: 63; Carvalho, 1997: 152). Rosario Linhares, the former national coordinator of the quilombo descendent project at the FCP, questioned why the law was applied only to those who were able to flee and join, or form, quilombos. "There were those that dreamed of fleeing and could not; those that fled and were recaptured; those that couldn't flee because they helped others to flee and their role was to stay" (see also Almeida, 2002: 61 and Gomes, 1996). After abolition, freed slaves went in search of land and work, and former maroon settlements eventually integrated with the surrounding community. Census, and scholarship would further render these communities invisible,⁵ as the lack of written documents, and inadequate attention given to oral traditions in rural black

5 See Escobar (2008: 56) for a similar context in black communities in Columbia. The historical 'footprints' or 'signature' of black communities tend to be less visible or misinterpreted (Runia, 2007: 316).

communities, resulted in studies that negated a quilombo past (Price, 1998: 248; Andrade and Treccani, 2000: 36).

In 2003, then President Lula created the Secretary for Policy and Promotion of Racial Equality, *Secretaria Especial de Promoção e Política de Igualdade Racial* (SEPPIR). Together with an interministry group they were charged with creating a new definition of maroon descendents that would articulate their particular history, trajectory, and contemporary status. Later that year, on November 20, 2003, a new legal decree (488-7/2003, art. 2, paragraph 1) revoked decree 3912, effectively abolishing the criteria 'origin by fugitive slaves' (Rocha, 2005: 97). Instead, it codified *self-identification*, based on Brazil's July 25, 2002 ratification of the 1989 International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Rights (O'Dwyer, 2002). The new definition recognized as maroon descendent communities *self-identified ethno-racial groups* with a history of slavery, oppression, and inequity, *independent of the way in which the community was formed* (Linhares, 2006), and included those located in both urban and rural areas. Auto-classification radically shifted the notion of quilombolas from an *historical artifact* (descendents of fugitive slaves), to a *political group* (oppressed minorities defending their territory), and resulted in a significant increase in groups mobilizing to be federally recognized by the FCP. Additional policies, such as the proposal for affirmative action (quotas) for blacks in federal, state and local institutions and university admissions⁶, and government decrees 10.639/2003 and 11.645/2008 mandating the inclusion of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and culture in public school curricula, have stimulated a different vision of the nation, expanded public discussion of race relations, revised the past, and set new political agendas for the future.

The discursive adaptation to these initiatives has been widespread. Attitudes, practices, and memories are increasingly mediated by emerging meanings associated with quilombolas, what Lowenthal refers to as "clarifying the past by infusing it with present purposes" (1998: xv). At community events, political rallies, and in oral histories and scholarship, the message is that quilombo descendents, like other Afro-Latin Americans, are involved in a *place-based but not a place-bound ethnic and political struggle* (Escobar, 2008). Often denied a 'usable past' (Ranger, 1975), quilombolas are increasingly inserting their narratives and experiences in national discourse as part of the production of the past, present and future (Arruti, 2006).

6 On June 16, 2010, Congress approved the Statute for Racial Equality, but removed the term 'racial inequality' and substituted it with 'ethnic discrimination,' stating that there is only one human 'race.' The statute reaffirms the need for additional attention to health care for Blacks (some interpreted this as meaning blacks would get preferential treatment in hospitals), culture, and agricultural credit, but eliminated the proposal for racial quotas in university admissions and political parties, as well as tax breaks for firms with over 20% black employees. Quotas to reduce ethnic inequalities will remain.

The application of this decree in a small community in the sertão, however, far from the urban centers of Afro-Brazilian activism, reveals some of the unresolved and contentious interpretations of policies that are meant to reconfigure the social, political, economic, and spatial location of rural black communities. The emergence and public articulation of a shared ethnoracial identity as federally recognized quilombolas linked to territorial and social (subaltern) place, and the defense and dissemination of a distinct place-based ethnic heritage, is huddled together with geography, class, gender, and local articulations of power and discrimination, adding complexity to the enforcement of quilombola heritage policies.

‘TAKING ON’ QUILOMBOLA IDENTITY

The fundamental orientation underlining the production and expression of quilombola heritage is the ‘taking on’ (*assumir*) or ‘shouldering’ of quilombola identity. This means expressing memories, cultural practices, and knowledge as ethnically based (Barth, 1998).

98

Prior to federal recognition in 2004, Talhados did not identify as quilombolas, despite a documentary film made about them forty years earlier (*Aruanda*) by the Paraíba film director, Linduarte Noronha, that defined them as ‘quilombo’ descendents. Talhados self identified as poor, rural peasants, as *assimilated Brazilians* sharing a geographical (sertão), rural cultural heritage framed by Iberian folk Catholicism, drought, and social relations embedded in obligations, responsibilities, and benefits that expand and contract during different times of the year (usually during political campaigns and elections). Despite the availability of conditional benefit programs such as the *Bolsa Família*, this form of social organization has not altered significantly. There continues to be intense alliance building associated with particular elites and politicians who promise favors in exchange for votes and loyalty.⁷

In late 2003, members of the Sabugi Valley alliance, which included state representatives from SEBRAE, an agency that provides assistance to small businesses, and state and federal representatives associated with anti-racism and black activism, convened a workshop on Afro-Brazilian history, religion and culture in the municipality of Santa Luzia, located 263 kilometers west of the coastal capital of Paraíba, João Pessoa. Participants included students, artists,

7 This foments violence and intense scrutiny, as even something such as attending the funeral of a relative of a candidate can rupture relationships. ‘Lucky’ voters secure employment with the local town hall (cleaning buildings, as a teacher), but these positions often evaporate when elections usher in a new administration, and the candidate they voted for (who provided the ‘favor’) is no longer in office.

members of the Brotherhood of Nossa Senhora do Rosário dos Pretos, and other interested community members. Also invited was Bernadete Lopes da Silva from the FCP, who gave a talk on preserving Afro-Brazilian heritage. The topics and discussions generated interest in pursuing recognition of Talhado as a maroon descendent community (Nóbrega, 2007: 15).

The workshop had been organized by municipal workers in the department of education, headed by the charismatic Teresa. Teresa was a young and dynamic leader, member of the PT (workers party), with extensive experience in popular education. Although not Afro-Brazilian, she came from a humble, agrarian background, and a lineage of activists working on behalf of the poor. Her mother of ten had been the first female secretary of education, her brother worked at the local radio station and Teresa also served as a city councilwoman. Her political acumen, close affinity with Talhados, and gift for public speaking, helped garner support for petitioning for recognition by the FCP. Traditional practices such as non-mechanized production of pottery,⁸ kin ties, traditional forms of authority, racial endogamy, and social and geographic 'isolation,' were identified as traits that fulfilled the contemporary legal definition of a quilombo descendent community. In 2004 Talhados were federally recognized, and a year later, the 'urban extension' of Talhado migrants living in one neighborhood was also recognized. Carrying out other mandatory federal initiatives, the education department then embarked on an active campaign to enhance knowledge of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, expand Black racial consciousness forums, and highlight the 'public secret' of pervasive racial prejudice. They actively encouraged community members to 'take on' or 'shoulder' quilombola identity as a way to enhance their well-being.

The initial impact of federal recognition was profound. There was both symbolic and political prestige associated with being a national cultural asset and an exotic historical artifact. Federal recognition catapulted the community into the spotlight and generated a level of attention that had been absent since the community formed in the mid 1800s. Researchers, journalists, and representatives from the World Bank (which funded construction of a road and a dam) visited Talhado. Community leaders travelled to conferences and were invited to speak at academic seminars and other venues. Local musicians were invited to play in Europe and the United States. There was animated talk of the potential for 'Quilombo heritage tourism' as a source of revenue, community development, and international connections. Judging from this exponential increase in interest and attention, it was anticipated that 'taking on' a quilombola identity was going to radically and permanently transform their lives for

8 Jan French (2009: 65) notes that this is also seen as a hallmark of Indigenous identity in the Northeast.

the better. There was visceral excitement over the potential for new, exciting, and lucrative options, opportunities and outcomes.

The political impetus to amplify Blackness, enhance consciousness about racial discrimination, and drop referents that indicate degrees of 'whiteness,' such as *moreno* and *mestiço* are radical transformations not easily accepted in an area where the dominant perspective is that the experiences of poor whites, mestiços, and Blacks are not sharply differentiated, as all experience class discrimination (Veran, 2010: 12). For some, there is a concerted effort to distance oneself from the stigmatized and homogenized category of 'negro' (black) to a more 'dignified' status as quilombola. As one young woman told me,

I have always identified, seen myself, as a negra, a Black woman. *But I don't want others, who are not black, to refer to me as such, because I know that when they use the term, it is pejorative.* To my face they say, 'What are you called now, *carambola*?'⁹ but I know that when my back is turned they say what they really think, which is say, 'Hump. I don't care what she calls herself now. *She is still just a negra from Talhados.*'¹⁰

100

This comment refers to the social pathologies ascribed to the neighborhoods where Talhados reside. They are considered local 'favelas' (shantytowns) and social problems (except corruption) are referenced as originating in these communities. Non-Talhados frequently refer to them as isolated, hostile, evasive, 'bad' blacks, 'quente' (both hot tempered and promiscuous), drunks, and illicit drug users, unorganized, and closed to participating in development projects that would improve their quality of life. Social and spatial distancing occurs through a discursive biological/geographical/racial paradigm that attributes such 'traits' to an innate predisposition towards a self-imposed inter-generational social and spatial isolation from those 'in the city,' code for white, civilized, literate, hard-working, church-going.

Although 'quilombola heritage' draws primarily from common origin, kinship, and shared territory, other tangible and intangible symbols and practices have become codified as 'traditional.' The legitimacy of quilombola heritage is contested, however, by those who feel they are just opportunists capitalizing on identity politics in order to access land (Veran, 2010). Soon after they were federally recognized, the urban extension of Talhados sought a land title not to

9 *Carambola*, starfruit, also refers to the red ball in billiards. This local use is a variant of *calhambola*, referring to fugitive slaves living alone in the bush, or in small or short lived quilombos or mocambos (Russell-Wood 2007: 20). In the *Dicionário da escravidão negra no Brasil* (2004: 79) it is described as a distortion of the word *canhembora* (canhi-mbora) referring to both slaves and Indians that have the 'habit' of running away (drapetomania); it is also described as a fugitive slave heading to the sertão.

10 Anderson (2009: 60) found similar reactions among the Garífuna in Honduras.

the area where they have traditionally lived, as they already possess titles, but to the land where they have traditionally *worked*. This land is owned by DNOCS (Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra as Secas), but has been abandoned (*terra devoluta*) for years.¹¹ The land is used by the ‘community,’ comprised of overlapping family networks, *but plots are private* (see also Oliveira, Jr., 1996: 201). Some activities call for community labor, but the division of labor relies on the decisions of particular families (Lucchesi and Fortes, 2009).

In 2007 INCRA began working with an anthropological team to start the land titling process. At one of the first community meetings with INCRA to discuss the process, there was vocal skepticism concerning the benefits of being a ‘Quilombola’ and holding a communal land title. There was vocal opposition to collective ownership, as selling to non-quilombolas is prohibited. Some expressed that a collective title was the equivalent of ghettoizing them, chaining them to an area with little market value, as the area in question is close to a foul smelling swamp. The discussion became increasingly more heated, with some yelling that “we all know some people will get more than their share,” and that current ‘private plots’ (in the contested area) will be sold. In addition, Talhados who are living in non-FCP recognized areas were also in attendance and expressed their dismay that although they are also entitled to restitution as originating from Talhado, they are exempt from getting ‘theirs’ because they do not live in the federally recognized area. This left the representatives visibly flummoxed and frustrated. Hadn’t they been invited by the ‘community’? Isn’t this what they wanted? They clarified that they were not there, as some assumed, to ‘give’ land to some people and not others, a common response to years of patronage and clientalism.

Non-quilombolas complained that, unlike Indigenous groups, there were few characteristics that distinguished Talhados as a separate ‘ethnic’ group. Although there was agreement that prejudice existed against *Blacks*, phenotype, or ‘color,’ is context and speaker contingent, and not all people who self identify or are ascribed as Black shared ‘difference’ as quilombolas. In addition, ‘connection to place,’ one of the requirements for petitioning for collective land titles, is common among non- Black, landless poor, who share similar memories of work, economic and political ties, migration history, and ritual and recreational practices, to those now claiming to be quilombo descendents.

Today, ‘invaders,” which include the homeless, landless, as well as speculators, illegally occupy the federally recognized area, which will eventually

11 DNOCS (previously IFOCS and IOCS), was created in 1946 to address the causes and consequences of drought. DNOCS constructed a dam in the town.

require their forced removal. This last issue in particular has provoked significant tension and debate, concerning both the historical legitimacy and political use of the category 'quilombola.' The notion that they are the 'legitimate owners' has aggravated relationships, and fomented envy and resentment because they will acquire a communal land title for 'free.' "How come only these black people get land? I'm *sem terra* (landless) too. I'm poorer and have experienced more discrimination than them," was a statement I often heard by those who feel that the quilombola land policy is discriminatory (see also Wade, 1997, and Anderson, 2009: 109).¹²

POTTERY AS A BADGE FOR QUILOMBOLA HERITAGE AND IDENTITY

Location, history of the settlement, relations with non-quilombolas, length of federal recognition, and access to resources all determine the content and meaning of Quilombola heritage. In general, there is a dearth of written information on the enslaved population and their descendents in the sertão. The gross omission of the signatures of their lives and labor of Afro-Brazilians has perpetuated a popular myth that slavery did not exist in the area. Sometimes this leads to the 'mining' or 'rescuing' of practices that were common among enslaved Africans, and marking them as 'quilombola' traditions (Vogt and Fry, 1996: 26, 344), or ascribing Afro-centric essences to cultural practices that are common in rural communities (see Bilby, 2005: 433 on Jamaican maroons).

Pottery production among Talhados is used as marker of ethnic identity and an instrument of quilombola heritage. The type of pottery is earthenware, coarse and hand-made using local clays. It is unglazed, low-fired, mostly undecorated, and with little variation. This type of pottery is a common artifact among assemblages from African Diaspora sites (Hauser and Armstrong, 1999: 69) and continues to be made in a number of rural black communities in Brazil the same way it was centuries ago.¹³ Some, but not all, women from the Talhado quilombo continue to make pottery the same way they did 160 years ago despite its physically arduous commitment and lack of remuneration.

Dona Rita, age 86, is a matriarch of the Talhado family and customary (but not official) head of the women's pottery cooperative. She makes it clear

12 *Sem terra* refers to the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra* Movement of Rural Landless workers –MST, who have advocated for land reform as a fundamental measure for redistributing income since the 1970s.

13 Jan French found in her study of the processes of 'making' Indians and Blacks in the Northeastern state of Sergipe that earthenware production was appropriated as an 'Indigenous' practice in the 1980s as a strategy by local groups to claim customary land rights and differentiate them from their neighbors (2009: 65).

to anyone who asks that she does not “understand what this quilombola stuff means.” Yet for her granddaughter, Céu, it is the central axis, the spine of her personhood, as she describes her work making clay pots, her relationship with her family (Talhados), and her social and spatial location as a ‘quilombola.’¹⁴ bell hooks, in outlining the politics of belonging, urges attention to “experiences that may no longer be an actual part of one’s life but is a living memory shaping and informing the present” (1989: 158). For Céu, the quilombola label is lived and embedded in every conversation, making a statement not only about her political status, but her roots, now residing in the ‘extension’ but remembering both her physical and metaphorical ‘quilombo’ origin 26 kilometers up a mountain. The memories of earlier generations, such as that of Dona Rita, were more closely related to a script of ‘family,’ reinforced through color, class and geographic endogamy. Today, quilombola heritage is shaped by black activist, multicultural, and human rights discourse.

As the leader for the *loiceiras* cooperative, Céu makes a point of identifying this practice as evidence of quilombola continuity, even though most of the women would readily give it up if they had other options for employment. Although vital to survival, female potters admit that it carries little monetary, symbolic, or use value. Most covet those who can display the shiny aluminum pots and pans that have become ubiquitous in poor households. In addition, the production process is extremely arduous. It requires long hours sitting on a dirt floor, and considered low-status because manual labor is in general viewed as degrading. The pots are marketed locally and cheaply and there are no ancillary benefits. They are rarely acknowledged as artistic, except among some middle-class artists and intellectuals who enjoy the ‘naturalness’ of these unpainted and undecorated pots. Despite its value as ‘traditional,’ consumers are rarely willing to pay the artisans fairly for their product. The *context* for production is certainly less aesthetic than the festive displays of the product: a crumbling warehouse, dirt floor, no light, broken windows, no piped water or sanitation. These opportunity costs certainly contribute to the gradual decline among younger women willing to ‘train’ in the art of making ceramics. They see their futures as professional teachers, social workers or singers.

I’d rather work as a maid than to sit in there all day (in the warehouse), in that filth, and make pots. For what? They make nothing! Look at the situation most of those women are in! Misery! At least as a maid I get things from my *patroa* (employer)—clothes, food, make-up. What do they get? *They are just slaves.*

14 Although the Talhado ‘family’ traces dual lines of descent (the founder had an Indigenous wife), a group cannot be federally recognized as both quilombolas and Indigenous. Their Indigenous ancestry had to be muted in order to fully ‘racialize’ their status as quilombolas.

Other women “wouldn’t be caught dead making pots,” and it is evident that those who do not rely solely on the income from pottery production are materially better off. They have sturdier brick and cement houses, and luxury goods such as furniture, sound systems, refrigerators, and stoves. This differs from the clay and stick houses, often crumbling and in need of repair, of most of the female potters. For quilombolas who do not make pottery, the *loiceiras* remind them of a past better left forgotten, a time of intense physical labor and difficulty, when the pots would have to be strapped to a donkey in order to make the arduous journey down the rugged mountain to the town market once a week. Pots always fell and broke into pieces, indicating loss of income. In many ways, this perspective is similar to Glade’s discussion of the changing meaning of earthenware among freed people of color in the southern United States. Earthenware continued to be used by those with “limited consumer choice...the feelings its use evoked was one of subjugation...it was a socio-economic symbol linked with slavery, and as such, stigmatized” (2009: 317-320). Like poor quality food, clothing, and homes, earthenware is a material emblem of low status.

104

Yet the intergenerational persistence in production, despite changes in the economy, residential arrangements, and income generating options for women, attests to the strength of this craft as part of the web of history and community-making among Talhados. The anthropologist and former president of IPHAN, Antonio Arantes, clearly captures this dynamic nature of heritage:

Things made bear witness to *ways of making things* and to *knowing how to make them*. They also shelter sentiments, memories and meanings that are formed through social relations involved in production, and in this way the work feeds back into life and human relations. The collective heritage produced by the work of generations of practitioners of a given art or craft is something more general than any individual piece produced, or any given celebration.... Rather, in each work or memory thereof, there is the testimony of that which someone is capable of doing” (Arantes 2004: 13, cited in Labate and Goldstein, 2009: 3).

Céu is thus faced with tremendous difficulty in infusing value and new meaning (as quilombolas) in a practice that is recognized as one of the most enduring traditions of this group. Archeological studies in the area show both Indigenous and African production of pottery and sharing of lifeways. But the value of the pottery does not lie solely in its significance as a static cultural retention, or even in its gendered, intergenerational lineage of female potters. As a “site of memory” (Nora, 1989), these clay sources are potent mnemonic vehicles for remembering a connectedness crafted from an assemblage of settlement history (up a difficult to access mountain), and networks of mutual

assistance which have been the scaffolds for the daily praxis of survival for generations. This dynamic (heavy reliance on local networks) has been reinforced, in part, by the socio-spatialized relations of inequality and exclusion with residents of the town center. In other words, the pots are a material signature of personal histories, social conditions, and structural relationships. Its importance today does not lie in proving it's "African" antecedents, but in depicting what the Afro-Brazilian journalist Edison Carneiro focused on long ago: social inequality among Afro-Brazilians.

Pottery production is kinetic in the sense that it *shapes* daily life, and the future, by actively communicating continuity, strength, and resistance in the face of chronic hardship, rather than a message that the community is 'dying out.' It is through the process of making the pots *as quilombolas* that this kinetic memory firmly 'takes hold,' embodied and 'toughened' by the strength needed to gather the clay and pound it into a powder with a heavy wooden stick, the talent and patience to mold and cut it into forms, the muscle needed to burnish the pots for hours with a stone, and the vigor to withstand the intense heat when firing it (in a large outdoor oven fed with wood and topped by broken pieces of clay). The pots are made in the same way they were over a century ago, and the women have resisted all attempts to mechanize this process, even though it would make the process less arduous and time-consuming. *It is in this power to control and decide production that gives it a noisy aura* by allowing the objects to 'tell the story' of this group, a distinction that mechanization and speed would erase (Funari, 2007; Agbe-Davies, 2007).

Representatives from the state job training center (SEBRAE) have offered numerous times to train the women in producing more marketable pots and non-quilombolas criticize them for "not wanting to change. They're lazy. They want to stay living in that *miseria* (poverty)."¹⁵ But this optic sees earthenware production and women's labor only in economic terms, as a kind of disembodied commercialism, not as a symbolic medium for translating a modern, newly developing consciousness as 'quilombolas.' Changes in production would mean sacrificing the praxis (strength, kin, female tradition) that makes this a distinct cultural practice. By holding fast to both the physical and social significance of the pottery, they claim identity, not just 'reflect it.'

CONCLUSION

Although writing about the construction of the nation, Benedict Anderson's writing on the notion of an 'imagined community' is applicable to quilombolas. He notes that they "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuine-

15 One member from SEBRAE even moved into the area in an effort to establish rapport with community members.

ness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (1991: 6). There is no template or formula for the meaning and practices associated with quilombola heritage. People *become quilombolas* at the intersection where the legal category meets regional meanings, practices, and social organization. Talhado quilombola heritage communicates a sense of personhood woven from deep religious, recreational, and physical ties to place, coupled with the active and ongoing struggle over political agency, land rights, and definitions of ‘who we are.’ The ways it is thought about, acted and felt is uneven, multilayered and fragmented, like the softened pots arranged in the large brick oven, being hardened into ‘tangible’ identity.

Quilombo heritage policies have fomented new conflicts as ethnic claims to land are seen as marginalizing other poor, landless, rural residents. They are accused of inventing or faking a ‘quilombo identity’ (for political, not cultural purposes) in order to capitalize on the benefits of recognition (land), fueled by the widely disseminated results of a Master’s thesis on the history of a Talhado written by a local historian (and politician) who concluded that ‘quilombola identity’ was *imposed on them*, instigated by local activists, but *not ‘felt’ by them* (Nóbrega, 2007). Getting a land title, however, is the exception rather than the rule. As of May 2011, only 13% of the communities recognized by the FCP have been titled. In Paraíba, none of the 32 certified communities have received titles.

Talhados appear to have ‘resisted’ change and maintained their cultural traditions. Although it is difficult to disentangle culturally specific quilombola traits from expressions of class and regional culture, this identity is manifested in the tangible houses made of clay and stick, as well as the intangible memory as discriminated persons, in their reliance on family (community), in their talent as potters, and in their historical narrative as descendants of ‘settlers,’ not slaves. The active use of these discursive and material practices challenges the rhetoric of ‘assimilation,’ a rhetoric that mutes the pervasive racial discrimination that Talhados have experienced for over one hundred years. The social distance from the lighter-skinned, well to do residents of the town center, the spatial exclusion in the peripheral ‘quilombo,’ and the endogamous networks of its residents places them squarely within the 21st century definition (Kenny, 2009).

Like that of many rural black communities, quilombola heritage policies provide one legal strategy for addressing structural poverty. The vestiges of a history of slavery and unfair labor practices, grinding poverty, depopulation, and drought, is clearly etched on people’s bodies, in their memories, and on the landscape. They are *authentically* poor, with modern forms of consump-

tion, and urban social problems. As modern Brazilian citizens, they accept the “bureaucratic reality of redistribution” (Besteman, 2008: 182) that comes from recognition as quilombolas. For some, federal recognition and the development of a quilombola identity has provided the foundation for responding to a derogatory racialized discourse (“*those* blacks from Talhado),” to a assuming a more positive ethnic identity, quilombola. It remains to be seen whether quilombola heritage policies will improve their material conditions, allowing them to ‘take their place,’ rather than keeping them ‘in their place’ (Cunha, 1998: 229). ✱

REFERENCES

Agbe-Davies, Ana S.

2007. "Practicing African American Archaeology in the Atlantic World", in Ogundiran, Akinwumi and Falola, Toyin (Eds.), *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, pp. 413-25.

Almeida, Alfredo Wagner B.

1996. Quilombos: sematologia face a novas identidades. In Frechal - terra de preto, quilombo reconhecido como reserva extrativista. São Luís, SMDH/CCN - Projeto Vida de Negro (PVN), pp. 11-19.

2002. Os quilombos e as novas etnias. In Quilombos: identidade étnica e territorialidade. E.C. O'Dwyer, (Ed.). Rio de Janeiro, ABA/FGV, pp. 43-8.

Anderson, Benedict

1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York, Verso.

Anderson, Mark

2009. *Black and Indigenous: Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Andrade, Lucia, and Girolamo Treccani

2000. *Terras de Quilombo*. In *Direito Agrário Brasileiro Hoje*. Raimundo Laranjeira (Ed.). São Paulo, LTr.

Arantes, Antonio Augusto

2004. "O Patrimônio Imaterial E a Sustentabilidade De Sua Salvaguarda," *Revista Da Cultura*, Vol. 4, No. 7, pp. 9-14.

Arruti, José Maurício Andion

1997. "A emergência dos "remanescentes": notas para o diálogo entre indígenas e Quilombolas". *Mana* Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 7-38.

2006. *Mocambo: Antropologia e História do processo de formação quilombola*. São Paulo, Universidade do Sagrado Coração and ANPOCS.

Barth, Frederik

1998 [1969]. "Introduction". In Frederik Barth (Ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Illinois, Waveland, pp. 9-38.

Besteman, Catherine

2008. *Transforming Cape Town*. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Bilby, Kenneth M.

2005. *True-born Maroons*. Gainesville, University Press of Florida.

Carvalho, José Jorge de

1997. "Quilombos: símbolos da luta pela terra e pela liberdade Cultura", *Voices* No. 5, pp. 149-160.

Cunha, Olivia Maria Gomes da

1998. "Politics of Identity in Brazil", in Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar (Eds.), *Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures. Re-Visioning Latin American Social movements*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview, pp. 220-51.

Escobar, Arturo

2008. *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes*. Durham, Duke University Press.

French, Jan Hoffman

2009. *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.

Funari, Pedro P.

2007. "The Archaeological Study of the African Diaspora in Brazil", in Ogundiran, Akinwumi and Falola, Toyin (Eds.), *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, pp. 355-72.

Glake, Laura J.

2009. "Colonowhen, Colonowho, Colonowhere, Colonowhy: Exploring the Meaning Behind the Use of Colonoware Ceramics in Nineteenth-Century Manassas, Virginia", *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* Vol. 13 No. 3, pp.303-326.

Gomes, Flávio dos Santos

1996. "Ainda sobre os quilombos: Repensando a construção de símbolos de identidade étnica no Brasil", in E. Reis, M.H.T.d. Almeida, and P. Fry, (Eds.) *Política e cultura: Visões do Passado e Perspectivas Contemporâneas*. Pp. 197-221. São Paulo: HUCITEC.

Hammond, John

2009. "Land Occupations, Violence, and the Politics of Agrarian Reform in Brazil", in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 156, No.4, pp.156-177.

Hauser, Mark W., Christopher Descantes, and Michael. D. Glascock

2008. "Locating Enslaved Craft Production: Chemical Analysis of Eighteenth Century Jamaican Pottery", *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology*, Special Publication No. 2, pp. 123-48.

Hooks, Bell

1989. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist. Thinking Black*. Toronto, Between the Lines.

Kenny, Mary Lorena

2009. "Deeply Rooted in the Present: Making Heritage in Brazilian Quilombos", in Laurajane Smith and Natsuko Akagawa (Eds.), *Intangible Heritage*. London: Routledge, pp. 151-68.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara

2006. "World Heritage and Cultural Economics". in Ivan Karp, Corinne. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frausto, (Eds.) *Public Cultures/Global Transformations*. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 164-202.

Labate, Beatriz Caiuby and Ilana Goldstein

2009. "Ayahuasca—From Dangerous Drug to National Heritage: An Interview with Antonio A. Arantes", *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, Vol. 28, pp.53-64.

Landers, Jane

2005. "Leadership and Authority in Maroon Settlements in Spanish American and Brazil", in José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-La France (Eds.), *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections during the Slave Trade*. Trenton, N.J, Africa World Press, pp. 173-14.

Leite, Ilka Boaventura

2000. "Os quilombos no Brasil: questões conceituais e normativas", in *Etnográfica*, Vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 333-354.

http://ceas.iscte.pt/etnografica/docs/vol_04/N2/Vol_iv_N2_333-354.pdf

2005 "O mito das três raças repaginado", from Núcleo de Estudos sobre Identidade e Relações Interétnicas (NUER), Florianópolis, UFSC. <http://www.cfh.ufsc.br/~nuer/artigos/mito%20das%20racas.htm>

Linhares, Luiz Fernando do Rosário

2006. *Comunidade negra rural: um velho tema, uma nova discussão*. Núcleo de Estudos Agrários e Desenvolvimento Rural, Ministério do Desenvolvimento Agrário.

Lowenthal, David

1998. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Lucchesi, Fernanda, and Maria Ester Pereira Fortes

2009. "Leituras locais da Política Quilombola: os casos do Maranhão e da Paraíba". in II Reunião Equatorial de Antropologia e XI Reunião de Antropólogos do Norte - Nordeste. Natal, RN.

Mbembe, Achille

2002. "The Power of the Archive and its Limits", in Charles Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid, Razia Saleh (Eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*. Cape Town: David Philip, pp.19-26.

Moura, Clovis

2004. *Dicionário da escravidão negra no Brasil*. São Paulo, University of São Paulo.

Nóbrega, Joselito Eulámpio da

2007. *Comunidade Talhado: um grupo étnico de remanescente quilombola. Uma identidade construída de fora?*. Campina Grande, Universidade Estadual da Paraíba.

Nora, Pierre

1989. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, Vol. 26, pp.7-25.

O'Dwyer, Eliane Cantarino (Ed.)

2002. "Quilombos-identidade étnica e Territorialidade". Rio de Janeiro, ABA/FCV.

Ogundiran, Akinwumi and Falola, Toyin (Eds.)

2007. *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

Oliveira, J. Adolfo Neves de

1996. "Reflexão Antropológica e Prática Pericial", *O Quilombo do Rio das Rãs: Histórias, Tradições, Lutas*. Salvador, Universidade Federal da Bahia, pp. 197-236

Oliven, Ruben George

1992. "A parte e o todo. A Diversidade Cultural do Brasil-Nação". Petrópolis, Vozes.

Pereira, Edmilson de Almeida and Núbia Pereira de Magalhães Gomes

2001. *Ardis da imagem: exclusão étnica e violência nos discursos da cultura brasileira*. Belo Horizonte, Mazza Edições, PUC Minas.

Price, Richard

1998. "'Scraping Maroon history : Brazil's promise, Suriname's shame", *New West Indian Guide/ Nieuwe West-Indische Gids*, Vol. 72, Nos. 3 and 4, pp. 233-55.

Ranger, Terence

1975. "'Towards a usable African past", in Christopher Fyfe (ed.), *African Studies since 1945: A Tribute to Basil Davidson*. London, Longman, pp. 17-30.

Rocha, Maria Elizabeth

2005. O Decreto No 4887/2003 e a Regulamentação das Terras dos Remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos. In *Territórios Quilombolas: Reconhecimento e Titulação das Terras*. I.B. Leite, L.F. Cardoso e Cardoso, and R. Mombelli, eds. Pp. 97-102, Vol. 2. Florianópolis: NUCER-Núcleo de Estudos sobre Identidade e Relações Interétnicas da UFSC.

Runia, Eelco

2007. "Burying the Dead, Creating the Past", *History and Theory* No. 46, pp. 313-325.

Russell-Wood, Anthony John R.

2007. "Atlantic Bridge, Atlantic Divide: Africans and Afro-Brazilians in Portuguese America", *Center for African Studies Working Paper Series*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University, pp. 1-52

Veran, Jean-François

2010. "Nação mestiça: As políticas étnico-raciais vistas da periferia de Manaus", *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social*, Vol. 9, no. 3.

Vogt, Carlos and Fry, Peter

1996. *Cafundó: a África no Brasil*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras.

Wade, Peter

1997. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. London, Pluto Press.

Whitten, Jr., Norman E. and Torres, Arlene (Eds.)

1998. *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.