

Remembering the Roots: Political Consciousness in the Quilombo Pitanga de Palmares in a Modernizing Society

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“Por isso, pensar e agir ‘fora da zona de controle da Casa Grande’ é nossa missão, é o nosso destino! Essa memória ancestral e a nossa resistência nos protegem do massacre físico, cultural e mental.”

-----Vilma Reis

That is why, to think and to act ‘outside the zone of the control of the master narrative’ is our mission, it is our destiny! That ancestral memory and our resistance protect us from the physical, cultural, and mental massacre.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	4
Definition of Terms.....	5
Introduction.....	6
Statement of Social Relevance.....	8
Theoretical Framework.....	9
Methodology of Research	12
Findings and Analysis	
Three Foreign Structures.....	14
(Re)presenting the quilombo	15
Dancing with Tradition	16
Interview 1 (President of Associação Binho).....	17
Interview 2 (Member of Associação).....	19
Interview 3 (President of Associação Bernadette).....	21
Interview 4 (Member of Associação).....	23
Conclusion.....	25
Indications for Further Research	26
Bibliography Primary Sources	27
Bibliography Secondary Sources	28
Acknowledgements.....	29

Abstract

Without a doubt, history affects greatly our modern realities. Yet, modernity proposes that we forget those things that make us different in order to be part of a society that is falsely seen as more advanced. One would expect that no one would understand better the need to remember history than quilombolas, people that live in communities with strong ties to their African ancestry. Whereas Brazilian culture makes it easy for the majority of citizens to forget their past by denying their racial background, an idea identified by academics and activists as “racial democracy”, quilombolas live in a reality that allows their African history to surface into their consciousness. Through interviews with some of the most politically active members of the *associação*, or the governing body of the quilombo, and observations of the quilombo community Pitanga de Palmares, I set out to analyze how politically conscious members of this community are. First, I asked each interviewee the history of the quilombo, an important step in the formation of political consciousness. There are 3 structures forced onto the community that are well known by perhaps all adult members: gas ducts underground, a prison, and a dam. Next, I asked interviewees to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of these structures and analyzed their responses. I found that this non-representative sample of the community had varying levels of political consciousness, that seemed to correlated with varying knowledge of the quilombo’s history, both more recent and further past. Indeed, political consciousness and acceptance of modernity seemed to be at odds. Luckily, in Pitanga de Palmares, the face of the community and perhaps the most active leader, does not forget her ancestry, is not seduced by modernity. and is quite concerned about conserving historical knowledge.

Definition of Terms

Quilombo- A community of Blacks in Brazil, usually rural, with strong ties to African ancestry

Quilombola- A person who lives in a quilombo

Associação- The group of adult men and women in the quilombo community that meet twice a week to discuss issues that affect the community, often meeting with officials from the local government

Palmares- The most famous quilombo in academia, having been the longest lasting and most extensive

Zumbi- The last leader of Palmares and the symbol of National Black Conscious Day in Brazil

Bumba meu boi- A traditional narrative dance telling the story of a slave who cut off the tongue of his master's bull in order to feed his pregnant wife who had a craving. He has to flee from a band of hunters, and is saved when a healer brings the cow back to life.

Samba de viola- A traditional quilombo dance

Dança São Gonçalo- A traditional quilombo dance

Petrobras- A Brazil-based gas company

Perfeitura- A town government

Political Consciousness- Being able to realize one's mistreatment as part of a historically occurring system of oppression

Racial Democracy- An idea started by the social theorist Gilberto Freire that claimed that slavery in Brazil was comparatively mild and less paternalism, in modern use the idea has come to symbolize Brazil as a place of racial equality, and is refuted by activists as masking institutionalized racism

Modernization- The ideal that sets a goal for all societies to aspire to be more like the mainstream

Introduction

Generally, the word quilombo refers to any rural community of Blacks whose way of life reflects ties to African ancestry.¹ Therefore, the word quilombo could mean anywhere from a community historically populated by people of African descent to an area where slaves fled from slavery. The majority of the areas known as quilombos today stemmed from communities formed when slavemasters abandoned their plantations both before and after the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888.² In the 1988 constitution, quilombos gained legal recognition and ownership of their land, providing them with certain benefits.³

The largest and longest- surviving quilombo in Brazil, Palmares, has gotten the most attention in academia. Lead initially by Gangasuma and then Zumbi dos Palmares, the quilombo was a network of settlements of fugitive previously enslaved peoples throughout what is now the state of Alagoas⁴ that defended itself from Portuguese efforts to recapture its peoples.⁵ Palmares managed to fend off attempts to take it down for over 200 years, and its inhabitants included not only escaped previously enslaved peoples, but also Native Americans and whites⁶. At its peak, the quilombo was huge with inhabitants numbering between 20,000 and 30,000.⁷ Not only was the quilombo Palmares multiethnic, but it also employed socialist economic practices.⁸

The figure of Zumbi has worked its way into larger Brazilian culture by way of National Day of Black Consciousness on the 20th of November each year, the date

¹ Abrams, Leonard A Report on Three Quilombos in Itapicura-Mirim

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Leal, Gilberto Fariga/Ifarada: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil

⁵ Conrad, Robert Edgar Children of God's Fire A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil, 368

⁶ Leal, Gilberto Fariga/Ifarada: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Nascimento, Abdias do & Nascimento, Elisa L. *Africans in Brazil*, 66

chosen for the date Palmares was defeated.⁹ Despite the popularity of the figure of Zumbi in academic and activist circles and ironical to the name of the holiday that commemorates him, most Brazilians, and most Brazilians of African descent even, do not know what a quilombo is.¹⁰

The reality of life for Blacks in Brazil today tends to be that of fewer opportunities than whites have access to. People of African descent comprise 53% of the population in Brazil, the majority. Yet, 28.5% of Blacks are illiterate, compared to 11% of whites.¹¹

Quilombolas, or inhabitants of quilombos, live outside of the reality faced by most people of African descent in Brazil. That is not to say they are without problems and do not face similar systems of oppression. The quilombo Pitanga de Palmares hosts 700 families outside of the city of Salvador, between the towns Simões Filho and Camaçari in Bahia. In the middle of the community is a prison, and running throughout the community are underground gas ducts. There was also a dam built in the community, displacing several families and splitting the community in two.

The quilombo receives monetary aid from Petrobras towards their activities, and the company also sponsors “social development” opportunities such as soccer lessons and percussion classes within the community. The dam, built for touristic reasons, provides a place where the quilombolas can fish, or just enjoy a beautiful view.

With this research, I analyze the way in which leaders of the quilombo Pitanga de Palmares weigh the benefits versus the costs of having the ducts, prison, and dam in their community as a means of evaluating their political consciousness. That is, do they attribute the presence of these structures in their community to racism, capitalism, or any other systems of oppression? Given the ways in which the structures can be viewed positively, have the pros of the structures taken away from their anger about the situation?

⁹ Leal, Gilberto Fariga/Ifarada: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil, 291

¹⁰ Leal, Gilberto Meeting 5/5/09

¹¹ Leal, Gilberto Fariga/Ifarada: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil, 291

Social Relevance Statement

Considering the history of quilombos and the ways in which that history has shaped their present reality, one would expect quilombolas to be quite politically consciousness, or aware of racism, capitalism, and other such systems of oppression as the cause of their mistreatment. The reality of life for Blacks in Brazil, including quilombolas, necessitates action. The way in which leaders of the community view the structures that oppress them reveals the effectiveness of the current mainstream discourse in hiding the need for action against systems of oppression. If quilombolas, people who identify themselves as descendants of people who fought against capitalism and racism, do not see their role as an active one against these same systems of oppression, the dominant discourse has done a good job in concealing the continued effects of these systems of domination in real peoples' lives. This process of suppressing political consciousness is one effect of the ideal of modernization, which aims to bring alternative societies into the mainstream ideals of Brazilian society. One such ideal in Brazilian culture opposite to those of a traditional quilombo is that of a racial democracy, or that Brazil is a country of racial equality. If indeed this process of modernization is occurring in a quilombo setting, then the importance of remembering one's roots as a means of resistance to systems of domination will be highlighted.

Theoretical Framework

The discourse about the work of the quilombo against social oppression might include issues of racism, capitalism, land reform. In the past, these were all systems of oppression that the quilombo initially had to work against. Without a doubt, these issues exist still. The degree to which modern quilombolas still recognize these as problems in society is interesting for its implications in modern society.

The current economic success that Brazil is experiencing is due in large part to slave labor. “The formation of the economic basis of the Brazilian nation occurred during the colonial period, essentially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, based on sugarcane cultivation in the northeast coastal region. During this two-hundred-year period, the Afro-Brazilian majority were the “workers”, the creators of wealth, while the white minority reaped the benefits of this unremunerated labor, setting the basis for the current unequal distribution of wealth.”¹² Brazil’s history is still crucial to understanding its present state, and knowledge of this unequal start and understanding how it affects present-day situation quickly leads to political consciousness. Being so closely tied to their history, one would expect quilombolas to more easily form the political consciousness that comes with knowing it.

The system of slavery has been one closely tied to the ideals of capitalism, and in their formation, quilombos have had to address this issue. The classification of people as “merchandise”, or products to be used for sale, was part and parcel of slavery, and is characteristic of capitalism.¹³ The quilombo necessarily had to respond to find an alternative to capitalism as an economic model and the way it encouraged the treatment of human beings. “Economically, the Palmares model employs rational production

¹² Leal, Gilberto Fariga/Ifarada: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil, 292

¹³ Conrad, Robert Edgar Children of God’s Fire A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil, 367

techniques (e.g., diversified agriculture instead of monoculture for export) in an economy whose means of production are collectively owned and rationally administered to the community's benefit. Quilombist economics maintain a harmonious relationship with the environment...as a whole.”¹⁴ The quilombo movement was also in part a movement for more just economic policy. It would be interesting to see whether quilombolas still view it as such.

Nascimento also describes the Quilombo social structure as optimal for the dignity with which people of different backgrounds were treated. The quilombo therefore went a step further in combating racism-- further even than the work done in the active resistance of forming a community of escaped slaves protecting themselves from attackers. “The difference between Quilombismo and European-derived socialism are evident. The latter makes no attempt to address the question of plurality of cultures or harmonious social relations among distinct ethnic religions, or other groups. Much less does it discuss the need to recover and reconstruct the cultural identity, human dignity, and protagonism of peoples subject to the holocaust of European colonialism.” The system of slavery thus led to the creation of a culture in quilombos that was more egalitarian in approach to racial differences.

Differences between the ideal of a quilombo put forth by academia and the reality can be attributed at least in part to modernization. The aim of modernization is to bring all communities into the flawed social structure : “Thus, we can understand the project of modernization by elements of states, corporations, and the international order, whose narratives, ideologies and projects seek to undermine, subvert, and contest the heterogeneity of people...especially of the poor, by “homogenizing” ideas of citizenship...”¹⁵ Yet from the start, quilombos were intended to be outside of society, refusing to accept elements crucial to mainstream society. The intended reason for the continued existence of quilombolas can thus be understood as, “...quilombolas use their narratives and affirmations of identity, and their alternative visions, to undermine, subvert,

¹⁴ Nascimento, Abdias do & Nascimento, Elisa L. *Africans in Brazil*, 66

¹⁵ Silberling, Louise S. Displacement and quilombos in Alcantra, Brazil: modernity, identity, and place, 147

and contest modernization.”¹⁶ The resulting political consciousness of the community depends on how they weigh the modern versus the traditional.

The argument for accepting the modern comes in part in the form of a racial democracy. As modernization in general does, the idea of racial democracy takes away consciousness: “Latin ruling classes evolved a paternalist form of white supremacism, based on the ideal of race mixture, called racial democracy, which is more insidious than aggressive racism. Emphasizing biological and cultural assimilation, it created an illusion of happy intermixture masking its racist content. The question of identity in the black community, crucial to any colonized or dominated group...became a dilemma so debilitating as to strip the victims of their collective consciousness of domination”¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nascimento, Abdias do & Nascimento, Elisa L. *Africans in Brazil*, 147

Methodology of Research

I stayed in the quilombo community Pitanga de Palmares for 18 days, sleeping in a room in the Candomble house at night and going to see my contact and president of one of the associacoes, Dona Bernadette, every morning. My observations of the community included accompanying Dona Bernadette to her meetings with local government officials, as well as my observations being in the community. I also conducted a total of 4 interviews with 4 members of the community, all of whom regularly attended the meetings of the associa ão which occurred twice per week. Two of my interviewees are the sole presidents of two different associações, and are mother and son. One of my other two interviewees was one of the most outspoken members during meetings of the associa ão, and the other is the husband of the head of one of the associações, and the stepfather of the president of the other associa ão. The associa ão meets to discuss what will happen to the community, and seems to often have speakers from one of the nearby perfecturies. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese, which is not my first language, and were restricted to the following questions, with my interruption only when clarification was needed:

What is the history of the quilombo?

What are the advantages of having the prison in your quilombo?

What are the disadvantages of having the prison in your quilombo?

Why do you think that they chose to put the prison here?

Overall, what do you think would be better, if the prison were not here or if it stayed here?

What are the advantages of having the dam in your quilombo?

What are the disadvantages of having the dam in your quilombo?

Why do you think that they chose to put the dam here?

Overall, what do you think would be better, if the dam were not here or if it stayed here?

What are the advantages of having the gas ducts in your quilombo?

What are the disadvantages of having the gas ducts in your quilombo?

Why do you think that they chose to put the gas ducts here?

Overall, what do you think would be better, if the gas ducts were not here or if they stayed here?

My questions were ordered in this manner- starting with what I consider the least advantageous structure and ending with what I considered the most advantageous structures to the community- so that participants would think more about the true value of the advantages considering the dangers that come with the structures. My questions were also chosen to reflect issues that affect the specific community directly while allowing me to analyze the thinking of community members about these issues. My interview questions were thus informed from previous observations of the community and interviews with community members. My sample group, members of the community's associa ão, I chose due to having too little time to get to know most community members well enough to have a comfortable interview. Members of the associa ão already regularly discuss similar issues to the ones I asked them about, and so I expected them to be the most comfortable to interview, as well as the best informed. Being from this group that seems to have voluntary membership, I can not consider my interviewees representative of the community as a whole. For this reason, I analyze my interviews individually, and then draw conclusions about what it means for the community to have leaders with political ideology as they have. I took handwritten notes summarizing what was being said during the interview, and so I very well might have missed something said

during the interviews. I analyze the community Pitanga de Palmares and how they approach the issues of the gas ducts, prison, and dam not only through the answers I got from my interviews, but largely also through what I have noted through observations.

Findings and Analysis

Three Structures

On just my second day in the community, I found out from one of the instructors that the drum lessons for young people in the quilombo were sponsored by Petrobras to “socially develop” the community because of the gas lines being run through the community. The instructor that told me this attends a catholic college and does social work. She said that the community’s associa ão chooses what activities are implemented in the quilombo, but I never confirmed this with anyone else. This instructor brings the sheets sits to the side all during the drum class and writes. One day, she took pictures of the group and then went back to write. The drums the students use are located outside of Dona Bernadette’s house, which doubles as a meeting place for the associa ão, within the gates. Therefore, I would expect Dona Bernadette, her husband, and her son, all of whom I interviewed, to remember that the drumming lessons are a result of the gas ducts in the community.

I have heard from some members of the community during an informal conversation that there are 17 gas lines underground in the community, but during an associa ão meeting, during which members of the community spoke with INCRA, an INCRA official said there were a total of 100 of the ducts, 50 on each side of the community, separated by the dam. At that same meeting with INCRA, Dona Bernadette stood up and paced for a while, waiting for an appropriate time to speak. When she spoke, she was passionate and said “everything bad comes to Pitanga de Palmares...they are Black”.

On my fourth day in the community, I learned from the man taking care of the Candomble house, where I slept, brought me to the dam. He told me that, although he had not yet moved into the community when the dam was being built, he heard that it displaced people in the process of building it. He said the government built it for beautification, as a means of bringing tourism into the area, and that they also wanted to build a hotel in the quilombo soon. He said he also thinks that the area is more beautiful with the dam. He also told me that the land nearest to the dam was owned by a wealthy landowner, and no one from the quilombo could farm there.

My first encounter with the prison was just a visual one. It is large, obvious, and does not look secure. Along with the dam and gas lines, I expected these to be the most important issues on the minds of community members.

(Re)presenting the quilombo

I understood the community in large part through my time spent with Dona Bernadette, and many other people outside of the quilombo do as well. She frequently went to the nearby prefeitura of Simões Filho and introduced me to the secretaries as foremost, from the United States, and then as one of 23 students doing research all in quilombo communities. I have corrected her several times in private telling her that there are 26 of us in all, and that only 2 of us went to quilombo communities and the majority of us are staying in Salvador working with non-profit organizations. Dona Bernadette also introduced me to the secretary of environment as doing research on the environment, and to the secretary of education as doing research on education. I had indeed told her at first that I wanted to interview young people of the community, so it is conceivable that she could have thought I wanted to do research on education.

Dona Bernadette seems to be closest to the secretary of culture in Simões Filho, and seems to try to appeal most to the secretary of social justice. The issue she seems to be most concerned with at the moment is that of houses in the community that are falling due to rain damage. One day, after a long day at the prefeitura, when I asked her if she had accomplished all that she wanted to do that day, she replied that she had forgotten to bring a picture of one of the houses in the community.

Dona Bernadette currently has her picture along with other people on a billboard in Simões Filho that reads “Simões Filho in favor of racial equality”. There were also the words “Reparação Racial” on the billboard. I went with her to a conference with the same name during my stay at the community. She brought some handicrafts with her that generally remain in her house, which included a handbag and a basket. She also brought her grandson, who is 8 years old and plays the viola. The conference consisted of cultural performances, followed by speeches about the importance of cultural diversity. Two of the secretaries mentioned Dona Bernadette, and the secretary of culture spoke about how well she represented her community. At the end of the conference, which was mostly about an ethnic group called caganos, Dona Bernadette was introduced and spoke a bit to the audience about Samba de Viola, which her grandson consequently played. After her grandson played, some capoeiristas performed while the majority of the audience went to another room to eat.

Dancing with Tradition

From a document prepared by either Dona Bernadette or one of her sons, describing an event that will show several traditional dances: “A cultura histórica tem objetivo de manter viva a consciência que a sociedade humana tem do próprio passado, ou melhor, do seu presente, Ou melhor, de si mesmo, sendo assim a cultura está acima da diferença da condição social”.¹⁸ Translated, “The historical culture has the objective of keeping alive the consciousness that a human society has of its own past, or rather, of its present, or rather, of itself, the culture thereby being above the difference of the social condition.” The traditional dances that quilombolas employ are powerful tools to keep in touch with their history, and according to this quilombo-produced text, knowing this history helps the community helps to strengthen itself through the formation of consciousness.

At another conference, the first national conference of public security, the quilombolas were the first ones on stage, opening the conference. The samba group does several sambas, and then they eat lunch and leave. Dona Bernadette and I are the only ones that stay. Bernadette is wearing the clothing she bought the day before in

¹⁸ Dona Bernadette, Grupo Cultural Danca Sao Goncalo Samba de Viola Raizes de Pitanga

Pelourinho from a Nigerian woman. The clothing is the most traditionally African looking of any that I have seen here wearing. After the first part of the conference ends, Bernadette speaks to several secretaries, introducing me to a few. The last of them is an old white man, and there is a circle of people around him of people all vying for his attention. The secretary of culture is closer in the circle than Dona Bernadette, and Bernadette calls her attention several times to remind her to introduce me to the man. We move around the conference for a while afterwards, never staying in any one place for long, and then Dona Bernadette goes to see the Secretary of Social Justice again.

The day before, the samba group had met to organize for the conference. Bernadette was in charge. At one point in the meeting, a man complained about how he was unable to speak although he is the oldest in the community. A part of his complaint was specifically aimed at Dona Bernadette, who spoke over him as he said this. He continued to interject complaints amid people speaking during the meeting, and no one responded to him. Soon, he got up and left, complaining the whole time.

The tension between this man and Bernadette is just one example of several power struggles that seemingly occurs around her. A similar thing happened at a meeting of women that work in the kindergarten. The meeting started with Bernadette asking who was going to stay, and a few people, including her daughter in law, raising their hands. The meeting soon broke out in a lot of shouting over each other, with a lot of people saying "It was everyone!", and Bernadette at times when there was silence saying things like "no one told me", "I don't sleep", and at one point she said "resistance, that is what a quilombo is" and looked at me and asked "right?".

It would seem that Bernadette has too much power for the liking of many of the people in the community. Yet, she is able to do so because she her attitude most reflects the community in the way that they would most like to be represented, the way that will get them the best results. She is, whether or not she truly believes in it, the best at putting forward a face of tradition. She knows the time to dress in traditional garments, the time to bring up traditional quilombo values, and understands that in order to get access to some of the top officials in order to help her community, using traditional dance can be a useful tool. She evokes her African history as a means of getting heard, a skill that few others seem to have. With the harsh realities of her community, they need someone with

her effectiveness. If the values of modernity are overtaking those of tradition, she seems like the one most likely to affect change back towards tradition.

Interview #1 Binho, President of one of the quilombo's associações (16/5/09) and Dona Bernadette's son. Before the interview, Binho asked me if the United States was very racist. I responded that it was, but that I think Brazil is as well. He responded that he thinks the United States is much more so. There also seems to be some tension about power between Dona Bernadette and Binho, with Dona Bernadette seeming to this time be trying to take over some of the responsibilities Binho considers his own.

The history of the quilombo to him is their ancestors, all they left, and the culture.

To him, there is nothing good about having a prison in the community, it only takes the shine away. To him, the disadvantages of the prison are that it is dangerous, and causes contamination of the dam. He thinks they chose to put the prison here as a shoe factory. He thinks it would be better if the prison were not here.

To Binho, the dam is good for water and as a tourist point. He does not see any downsides of having the dam here. He thinks the dam is here because it just rose here, and is a thing of god. He thinks overall, it is for the best that the dam is here.

At first, Binho said there was nothing good at all about having the gas lines underground. When asked what was bad about it, he answered that there was the concern about land, and that no houses could be built nor could anything be planted where the gas lines were. He then returned to the first question, saying that something good about them was that they helped in some events, such as celebrations. He said that he thinks the quilombo was chosen as the site of the gas line because it is close to the industries, and answered that it would be better if they were not here.

Binho does not mention African heritage explicitly in his answer to the first interview question about the history of the quilombo. Similarly, he does not mention racism or any other systems of domination in any of his other answers. Yet, the only one of the things in the community that he thinks the community is overall better for having is the dam, and that seems to be because he does not know the history of the dam and the problems its being built have caused in the past. He sees the dam as naturally occurring

rather than man-made and sees tourism as a positive industry to build up in the community. Seemingly not knowing the history of the dam and the damage it has done, it comes to no surprise that he would say only positive things about it, which are in line with ideals of modernization. The negative aspects of having the gas lines in the quilombo seem to vastly outweigh the positives, as he forgets to mention the aid coming directly from Petrobras at first, and concludes that it would be better if they were not here.

His answer that the quilombo was chosen as the site for the passage of gas lines only because they are close to the industries is plausible although it shows little political consciousness to not mention that perhaps it was a racist or capitalistic decision to put something so dangerous in a politically unpowerful community of Blacks. His answer about the prison being in the community similarly does not recognize historical injustice against Blacks and politically powerless peoples, and his justification for its existence as a shoe factory does not give an answer as to why the quilombo was chosen.

Binho's pre-interview answer that he thought Brazil was much less racist than the United States might shed light on the source of his answers. Perhaps he thinks of racism as a thing of the past, and so even if knowledge of his history might raise his political consciousness, he could be influenced by the modern ideas put forth as a racial democracy that racism no longer is a big issue in Brazil.

Interview #2 Member of Associação, (22/5/09) not born here, but moved here with her husband where he found work. She is an Evangelical Christian and has a daughter. She thinks that she would like to move out of the quilombo some day although she likes it a lot, just because she would like her daughter to have access to a better school.

To her, the history of the quilombo is that it was formed by black slaves that fled and whites without proper financial conditions that fled their origins, and the two combined to make the current people in the quilombo. She then remembers that Indians were a part of the equation. She mentions Zumbi. She then explains more about the role of Indians, to help the escaped slaves that did not know how to survive in a strange land. The Native Americans and Blacks helped each other, she said. She then went on to speak about more modern history of the quilombo, telling me that the quilombo was far from

everything, and that the associa ão is trying to get some of the necessities for the quilombo, such as a hospital. She then went on to say that the government does not think enough about Blacks.

When asked about the advantages of having the prison in the quilombo, she responded that there was none. To the disadvantages, she answered that there was a great risk to their security, a fear of rebellion, fear of thieves, and that the land that is theirs is being taken up. She also brought up the issue of contamination in the streets caused by the prison. She thought that the government decided to put the prison there because of its distance from everything, and so if the prisoners rebelled, it is easier to contain them, since there are no open streets. She thought it would be better if the prison did not stay, saying that it brings no benefits.

When asked about the advantages of the dam, she said it was a natural resource bringing fish, that it was a place to relax, and that it had clean water, which is necessary for life. When asked about the disadvantages, she said at first, "the dam? None." She then thought for a while and then asked for clarification from Dona Bernadette, who was nearby, if the implementation of the dam indeed forced people of their homes, as she had suspected. After asking the question, she turned to me and told me that in order to be built, the dam dispossessed people's farms, breaking up the land of the conquered people. When asked why she thought it was put here, she answered that it was financed by the government. She thought it would be better if it stayed here, and that now that the people who were moved are already gone it should just stay.

When asked about the advantages of having the gas ducts underground in the quilombo, she answered that there were none. When asked about the disadvantages, she responded that there was a great danger for the people that live around them. She thinks it was put in place because of government money, and that it was cheaper to put it where people live, although it put everyone at risk.

This associa ão member seems to have more formal knowledge of the history of quilombos in general, and not necessarily knowledge about this specific quilombo's history. She mentions, unlike any of my other interviews, escaped slaves specifically, when the word quilombo by modern definition does not necessarily refer to a community started by escaped previously enslaved peoples, and this community might not have been

one of those. As a non-native member of the community, perhaps she has not learned the history of the specific quilombo in the same way that native members have. Despite her knowledge of the historical ties the community has to opposing racist societal values, she does not identify racism explicitly as the reason for any of the three discussed issues in the community, as I had expected. She hints a bit at capitalism as a problem, when she cites the government's money as the reason for the existence of the gas ducts, which she would prefer were not in the community.

This member either does not know that there are advantages brought to the community from the gas ducts in the form of "social development", or does not consider them sufficient enough. Nothing from my observations would indicate to me that she knows, but supposedly it was members of the governing body of which she is a part that decided what activities to put in place.

Although she realizes that the dam has displaced people in the process of being built, she still believes that it should remain. She also realizes that it was by government financing that it was put there, and not the people's choice. Weighing the good that the dam brings to the community and the bad, she has chosen to accept the subjugation/benefits of the dam. This is the issue of modernization: it causes a dependency on what it has brought. It is quite understandable that the dam has brought many good things to the community, but it is also quite unacceptable that the effects of its being built include splitting the community in two. Just as quickly and easily as that fact can be forgotten, modernization erases the effects of ancestral memory: political action. A possible reason for her choosing of modernization over politically conscious action is that she, as a non-native member, might not feel connected to the community enough to consider the quilombo's history her own.

Interview #3 Dona Bernadette, President of one of the quilombo's associações, (23/5/09) has strong connections with the secretary of culture of Simões Filho, the nearby town, frequently represents the quilombo in conferences and to government officials.

To Dona Bernadette, the history of the quilombo started with the old “caboclos” (white/Indian mixed peoples)¹⁹ and descendants of slaves forming “mocambos”, (another name for quilombo)²⁰ and that afterwards the dam changed the quilombo, moving some members to one side and others to another side. Her grandmother, Dona Maria started a party that lasted 7 days. After the dam, the ducts came. She mentions other names, mostly women. Then they made a church and had the dance of Sao Goncalo. She mentions the history of the quilombo the dances samba de viola, bumba meu boi, and bale de pastorinha.

Dona Bernadette believes that there are no advantages to the prison, and the disadvantages to her are that it takes away the character of the community, she mentioned marginalization, and said that it does not do anything for the community. She thinks it was put here just because the government decided that it should be here, and the government gets to do what they want. She thinks it would be best if the prison were not there, because the community does not accept it and it is dangerous for the many children there.

Bernadette thinks there is no advantage to having the dam here. The disadvantage of the dam to her is that it does nothing to help the community. She does not know why it was put here, it is just a government thing.

Bernadette does not see any advantages to the gas ducts, and the community did not choose it. She says there are several disadvantages, such as danger to the community, and the community does not develop because of it. She thinks it was put here because it was closest, and thinks it would be better if it were not in the community.

Dona Bernadette shows a strong connection to her history, using words that it seems most quilombolas would not know. She mentions both far past and more recent history, showing her vast knowledge, and awareness of how more recent events like the building of the dam also have grave effects on their lives. Her reference to the cultural dances of the community shows that it is important to her to keep alive symbols of their history in order to raise the community’s consciousness.

¹⁹ Reis, Joao Jose; Gomes, Flavio dos Santos Quilombo: Brazilian Maroons during slavery

²⁰ Ibid.

Bernadette did not mention explicitly any systems of domination, saying for the prison and dam that Pitanga de Palmares was chosen as the site for them just because the government decided to do so. Once again, she could be referring to the power struggle that is capitalism, but it is not certain. Her response that the quilombo was chosen for the gas ducts because it was closes could just be fact, or it could be that she does not consider the possibility that her community is target to racist and capitalist sentiments from those in positions of power, as it was in the past.

Dona Bernadette did not find any of the three structures advantageous, saying there was nothing good about having either the dam or the gas ducts. To the people of the community, there are certain some benefits to those two structures. Her answer would therefore indicate either an unawareness of those benefits, which is rather unlikely considering that her husband sometimes fishes in the dam and the drummers who get funding from Petrobras have to come to her house each class, or she considers the advantages just that miniscule compared to the disadvantages. If she decided that the losses to the community of having the three structures far outweigh the gains, it would indicate that she has a high level of political consciousness, fitting with her knowledge of history. It would seem that she has not been lured in by the prospect of modernity.

Interview #4 Member of the associa ão, (23/5/09) husband of Dona Bernadette, not born in the quilombo.

What he knows about the history of the quilombo is: Let's suppose one comes here and marries a quilombola, you are one too, regardless of origin or color. Those things do not matter.

To him, there are no advantages to the prison, only disadvantages. He would like to see in the community a college or a hospital, but not a prison. The prison, he believes, brings problems for the community, and unnecessary things like drugs and confusion. He believes that they were deceived about the prison, that by the time they found out it was being put there as a shoe factory, it was too late. He would prefer if the prison did not stay in the community.

The advantages of the dam to him are that people in the community are that it allows for creative profit through fishing, and that it allows for activities such as swimming. To him there are no disadvantages to the dam, for now. He thinks the dam was put there because it was appropriate, and that it maybe brings some advantages to some of the inhabitants. When I asked if he thought it would be better if the dam were here or if it weren't here, he responded that from his point of view it can stay.

He says that there are no advantages of the ducts for now, only promises but no advantages. The disadvantage to him is that the ducts take up an area of land so that now there can be no return from that land. He says that he thinks the community was chosen for the site of the ducts because it meant faster means of transport. He thinks it would be better if the ducts were not her because it would be better for the community, because they are on top of a bomb.

This associa ão member's view of quilombo history is very personal, reflecting his own experience with the quilombo. He seems to view the quilombo more as a welcoming place open to many different people more than anything else. This openness to many different people is indeed a part of the history of many quilombos. However, he does not seem to consider greatly the history of fighting against slavery, and his political consciousness seems to reflect that fact.

His assertions of the dam as only advantageous and the gas ducts as solely disadvantageous, although cautious, seem more than anything to reflect a lack of knowledge about the facts. As an associa ão member and the husband of perhaps the most active member of the community, this is quite unexpected.

His belief that the quilombo was chosen as the site of the dam because it would perhaps bring advantages to some people of the community, and the site of the gas ducts because it was the easiest for the gas companies shows little sign of political consciousness. It would seem that this stems from a lack of knowledge of history, both of the way the dam was implemented more recently, and of Black subjugation in the further past history of the quilombo.

Conclusion

Being in a foreign community for 3 weeks, conducting interviews in a language that I started learning less than 4 months ago, I think it is unfair for me to come into the community with my ideologies and either criticize or try to fit into my own the ideology of the community. Yet, this seems to be a problem of qualitative research in general. If I am in any way to analyze what I saw and heard in my stay in the community, I will have to do so from my own academic lens. I run the risk of being ethnocentric in this approach, putting my own cultural bias on a pedestal. Most members of the community do not view the world in the same terms as I do, and I would not like to portray them as such. At the same time, there are conclusions to be drawn about what I found that has implications for our society as a whole.

It would seem that political consciousness varies greatly amongst leaders of the community. Knowledge of their history generally seems short, and at times it is outweighed by the promises that modernization brings. Another possibility is that my interviews did not fully bring out the full extent of the quilombolas' historical knowledge. Whatever the reason, as a result, some members of the community's governing body seemed to subscribe to the tenets of modernization that are at odds with the origins of quilombos. It might be a dangerous sign that modernization has reached a community such as a quilombo, the very existence of which was supposed to oppose mainstream society. The problems that mandated the formation of these communities are still prevalent in mainstream society, but perhaps they have been better hidden.

Yet there is hope. The community leader that most represents the community to outside society, Dona Bernadette, seems to have a great deal of knowledge about her

history and perhaps this is where her rejection of modern ideals comes from. In both her actions and words, she brings forward her ancestry to get what is best for her community.

Indications for Further Research

If I had the opportunity to do further research on this subject, I would like to spend more time in the community, getting to know them well enough to interview a more representative sample. It is also important to not enter the community with expectations of the people there to have lofty ideologies. Finally, it is important to cater the research to the realities of the community: I believe it makes interviews more comfortable for the interviewees, and produces longer, more passionate responses.

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