

THE QUILOMBOLA AND THE COWBOY

DOI
10.11606/issn.2525-3123.
gis.2022.185555

DOSSIER RELIGIONS: THEIR IMAGES,
PERFORMANCES AND RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

The artwork “The Quilombola and the Cowboy” (Painting, oil on canvas, 50 x 50 cm. Peçanha, Minas Gerais – Brazil. March 2021), along with its poem, was produced by the artist and researcher Filipe de Oliveira Maciel, through the ethnographic fieldwork, in execution, of the research “The Identity Process of the Quilombola Communities of Peçanha, Minas Gerais – Brazil: Oral History, Culture and Ethnicity”, oriented by Prof. Dr. Marivaldo Aparecido de Carvalho. This research is carried out through PPGER/UFVJM, with support from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES), Brazil. The artwork constitutes a process of performative transformation of the field diary into plastic arts, to manifest preliminary results of this research which finds in the land, spirituality, and violence the main mechanisms of identity structuring in these quilombos. It is a mechanism of expression of languages, codes, rituals, historical trajectories, ancestral knowledge, and dialectical relations experienced ethnographically by the body-soul-researcher, aiming to express the unspeakable and to contribute to other dimensions of the production of anthropological science.

KEYWORDS
Quilombola;
Peçanha, Minas
Gerais – Brazil;
Ethnography;
Culture; Spirituality.

1. This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior – Brasil (CAPES) – Finance Code 001.



Êêêêôôôôohhh liiife of caaaattle!!! Bells were swinging, the leather was tearing the bush full of thorns, a character forged in the earth and in the animal, a body shouts the tune in the middle of the dark forest and the brightness of the full moon shows the cowboy that his destiny was to find the forest. There, in the forest, Grandma Rita prayed “Saint Bernabeu, I asked our Father to rain on land” and the waters fell. Those people, who were forced to cross the sea of the world, brought with them the strength of an unshakable faith, which structured their defenses to survive and fight, also giving them animus to gladden in the midst of sadness. Inheritance of the allies of the people from the forests, in the dance keeps alive the Caboclada, skirts made of Guinea fowl feathers, drums echoing in the forest, the reco-reco setting the

tone of the stride, sugar cane brandy warming the chests at night, because while the daylight reigned, the blood and sweat dripped. Life cannot be only suffering. “My father Santo Antonio, have pity on those who suffer, I walk day and night fulfilling a promise” the Marujada enchanted, colorful and illuminated, reaffirms each presence on the boundaries of time. And it is determined that God is not vengeful, that when the father steals, the son eats and the grandson starves, and the hand that used to scourge, today applauds afflicted. It was and is this way, that the richest identities of Peçanha were forged, that brought true nobility to the cradle of Minas Gerais’ culture, through the meetings and mismatches of destinies. In the maintenance of a complex symbology and set of moral and spiritual codes, they write and maintain their way of life, their history in the secrets of orality, in the beauty and subjectivity of culture, and in the maintenance of their boundaries in body territory, soul territory and earth territory.

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2. Research Approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal dos Vales do Jequitinhonha e Mucuri, according to the Consubstantiated Opinion 4.438.981 of December 04, 2020.

They are considered to be the remnants of quilombos communities, the ethnic-racial groups, which according to criteria of self-attribution (that is, through self-definition by the community itself), with their own historical trajectory, endowed with specific territorial relations, with presumed black ancestry related to the resistance to the historical oppression suffered. The remainders of quilombos communities have the right to the recognition and titling of the definitive property of the territories traditionally occupied. These definitions are in accordance with Article 68 of the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil (Brazil 1988) and Decree n° 4887 (Brazil 2003). In the text of this work, “quilombola community” or “quilombo” is understood to refer to the group or its territory, and “quilombola” is understood to refer to the individual who self-recognizes as such. It is emphasized that this canvas and poem, fruits of the aforementioned research, are inspired by the two quilombola communities studied, named *Jorges de Água Branca* and *Purificação*.

In the heart of the Rio Doce Valley, in the municipality of Peçanha, Minas Gerais, occurs since 2018, the flourishing and effervescence of the quilombola cause. The quilombola community *Jorges de Água Branca*, upon being certified by the *Palmares Foundation*, was a pioneer in the municipality in this question, being an inspiration and stimulus for the following year the quilombola community *Purificação* to start its process, still in the organization phase. The researcher *Filipe*, a native of Peçanha, having fraternal and family ties in these territories and having experienced these realities since his childhood, got involved with the communities to professionally support them in their recent demands.

When asked by the communities to assist in the study of these quilombos, initially the main immediate needs were presented, expressed in the struggle for the conquest of certification as remaining quilombola; in the founding of the community association and the transformation of the statutes; in the search for the restoration of traditional cultural trades and the rescue of the historical trajectory. Through these needs it was identified that a deeper and more complex process was taking place, since they signified the identity claim through group positioning based on historical and cultural differentiation.

Thus, it is born this research, in progress since august 2019, which of interdisciplinary nature, but with an anthropological focus, investigates the processes of identity construction of these quilombos through oral history, culture and ethnicity. We do not propose here, at the moment, to discuss the problematic of the research³, since we seek in this text,

3. Part of this research, during the bibliographical search phase, review of the written history of Peçanha (Minas Gerais, Brazil) and theoretical conceptual introduction to the proposed identity studies, was presented at the VI Congress of the Latin American Association

precisely an appreciation and promotion of another field of language in the production of anthropological knowledge. But, for a better contextualization of the ethnographic field that inspired the canvas “The Quilombola and the Cowboy”, the result of the initial stage of this field, we make only a few general notes.

Still in the phase of fieldwork, through a methodology of participant research (Brandão 2006; 1999), has been experienced ethnographically the rich symbolism of traditions that subjectively structure their cultural identities (Laraia 2001), as by the called Marujada and Caboclada (traditional religious manifestations, with their own clothing, music, choreography and ritual). Also, relations of maintenance of ethnic boundaries (Poutignat e Streiff-Fenart 2011) between individuals within the quilombos and different groups, for example through food, religious celebrations, and political dialogues by community association. Orality (Vansina 2010) is also highlighted as a cosmological mechanism of knowledge transmission and a strategic means of maintaining their way of life. Through orality elements such as the taboo of the Holy Day and medicinal/spiritual knowledge have been presented.

It is very challenging to do this work in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the current political situation in Brazil. But if on the one hand many activities suffer restrictions or interruptions, on the other hand it highlights contrasts, violence, agrarian dynamics of these rural quilombos, and diacritical elements (Cunha 1986) are reaffirmed. There are customs that the group does not live without, that the threat of imminent death that the pandemic poses to us does not affect dialogues of different dimensions of which the groups already operate at this level of language. Languages, codes and universes, of life and death, of visible and non-visible world, of human being and nature, encounters and contradictions, rites and traditions. It is in this way, so far, that land, spirituality and violence have been identified, through the body-soul-researcher who is ethnographically experiencing these realities, as the main structures of quilombola identity construction in Peçanha.

The body-soul-researcher is living the stories of Grandmother Rita, of cures, midwives, rain prayers. The stories of pain, hunger, and violence from a distant and dialectically present past. The sound of boxes/drums that resonate on the frontier of earth territory, body territory, and soul territory, a language that crossed the ocean centuries ago. The body-soul-researcher is experiencing the healing of a malaise by a medicine that is “something from another world, right?!” It is experiencing even what it

of Anthropology (ALA) in November 2020. The work will soon be found in the Actas of the Congress (which is in process of publication).

doesn't even know that it is experiencing. He is also getting emotional, feeling tastes, vulnerabilities, loves, fears, pleasures, and knowledge.

And then the body-soul-researcher accumulates an experiential material of decolonial and political struggle. Of a subjective universe that goes from the dimension of the land that plants to the flowering of the soul. Of a ritualistic religious symbolism in which the aesthetics of his field diary performatively transforms itself into canvas, brush and paint, to say that which cannot be spoken... because, if in anthropological research the researcher reaches the interior of houses, kitchens, casseroles, prayers, beliefs and various intimacies, he also reaches secrets that must be kept just like that, in the trust of the exchange of those with whom contact is made.

**TRANSLATION
REVIEW**
Professor PhD
Rosana Passos
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Authorship contribution. Filipe de Oliveira Maciel: conception, data collection and analysis, drafting and writing of the manuscript, discussion of results. Marivaldo Aparecido de Carvalho: guidance, data analysis, review of the manuscript writing, discussion of results.

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Received: 05/14/2021

Approved: 09/14/2021