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Rural communities and ethnic identities in Latin America

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Abstract

This article has as its focus the new configurations of rural communities in Latin America. From the concept of *neocommunities*, we intend to show that traditional communities have been, since the last decades of the twentieth century, a privileged domain of public policies and social and cultural projects developed by NGOs, cultural tourism agents, Universities, the media and others. We observe that in maroon *neocommunities* in Brazil these modern agents develop actions of reconstruction, of practices and knowledges of the afro-brazilian universe which influence the dynamic of rural space.

Keywords: Rural communities and culture; communities in Latin America; maroon populations in Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

This article approaches the politics of recognition in Latin America regarding traditional rural communities, mainly indigenous and afrodescendent. Our aim is to show that, in the last decades, land property and cultural policies have been implemented in diverse countries of the region, activating ethnic identities which remained relegated or invisible from a cultural point of view.

In this sense we developed the concept of *neocommunities* to draw attention towards processes of (re)construction of identities in diverse national contexts, mainly in maroon communities of Brazil in which we developed case studies, in the North region of the State of Rio de Janeiro between 2000 and 2006.

The approximation between the ethnic and the communitary has a long trajectory, both in Brasil and in Latin America, with various implications in national histories. As Afonso Arinos (Arinos, 1973) had shown, the European representations of the naked indian of the tropics, that moved freely on large tracts, were one of the imaginaries which mobilized the French Revolution. However, indigenous peoples, and soon the slaves from Africa, were confined to the spaces of the village and the slave quarters, marking a trajectory which had its continuity in indigenous reservations policy and in the shaping of rural black communities after the abolition of slavery. Therefore, the

approximation between the ethnic and the community are long-standing both in Brazil and in Latin America, with diverse implications on their national histories.

Our interest is focused on what is new in these community configurations in Latin America and especially in Brazil, which we try to grasp through the idea of *neocommunities*. We intend to show that traditional communities have been a privileged framework of public policies and private agencies and institutions (cultural agencies, NGOs, cultural tourism, among others), and that these have imprinted changes in community dynamics. Mainly actions and programs seeking the “reconstruction” of ethnic identities, an issue that, besides being unique from a cultural standpoint, has ramifications on the political and theoretical level. From a theoretical point of view, we place ourselves in a non primordialist approach to ethnicity (Barth, 1976; Cohen, 1985; Lamont, 2000). As Barth had observed, ethnic communities do not have objective stands, such as territory or ancestry. Ethnic groups constitute their identity in the symbolic plane and from the interaction with other groups. However, we identify in our research issues that reinstate the theme of objective stands and also other referents which go beyond the groups themselves. As Brubaker (2002; 2004) had noted ethnic groups cannot be thought of as concrete identities, but as a relational process which should be analysed in terms of *practical categories, cognitive schemes, discursive structures, organizational routines and contingent events*. According to this perspective, the analytical basis would no longer be the group, but the *groupness*, as a fluctuating and conceptually variable context. In this sense he observed that:

To rethink ethnicity, race and nation hood along these lines is in no way to dispute their reality, minimize their power or discount their significance; it is to construe their reality, power and significance in a different way. Understanding the reality of race, for example, does not require us to posit the existence of races. Racial idioms, ideologies, narratives, categories and systems of classification and racialized way of seeing, thinking, talking are embedded in powerful organization. (Brubaker, 2002:168)

Furthermore, it should be considered that ethnic and cultural identification, of groups or individuals, is inserted in *public narratives* which circulate at different scales (local,

macro, etc.) and which interfere in several ways on those identity definitions (Somers, 1994).

We mainly study processes of “reconstruction” of knowledge(s) and territories of communities of African descent in the context of Brazil’s 1988 Constitution, which in article 68 re-signified and updated the maroon issue which was associated to the historical issue of the slaves who fled to isolated regions, constituting a *habitat* called *quilombos*. From the 1988 Constitution, and especially under the Lula government, black populations in rural areas had the right to claim the lands in which they live. This phenomenon reactivated the question of a social identity which claims that maroon past. Current maroon communities are geographically dispersed and are heterogeneous in terms of their cultural trajectories. However, this phenomenon of a reconstruction of a social identity which refers to slavery extends to the present day, joining the fight for territories of indigenous groups. This article addresses the question of that interrelationship between cultural identities and the territory, identifying new dynamics in rural regions.

RECONSTRUCTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In most Latin American countries, the political recognition of some ethnic groups, such as the indigenous, took place at the end of a process of devastation in which the abandonment of identity marks (such as plumes of feathers, body paint, collective ceremonies, native languages) was regarded as the most visible signs of acculturation and the imminent extinction of groups (Saez, 2003). Currently, these identity markers have been reappearing as signs of an opposite sense, bearing witness to the persistence of indigenous peoples and the emergence of others considered extinct. This process has received various denominations, such as “revitalization”, “recovery”, “rescue” or “invention of traditions” (Saez, 2003).

For some indigenous groups, as in north-eastern Brazil, for example, this resumption implied the learning of the Toré ritual, considered, in the existing institutional framework, as an indispensable sign of indigenism, but, in other cases, it tried to reintroduce identity marks, such as the native language, generally through “field trips” to other villages where those languages or rituals were still utilized. Saez cites the case

of indigenous groups who learned to use body paint or adornments inspired by drawings and photographs of other ethnicities.

With regards to indigenous peoples and cultures in the northeast of Brazil, Cardoso de Oliveira (1999) pointed out that at the end of the nineteenth century the existence of indigenous peoples in the region was no longer spoken of, but that situation had begun to change since the 1970s. In the 1950s ten ethnicities had been classified in north-eastern Brazil and forty years later 23 indigenous ethnicities had been identified. In 2000, there were already 40 indigenous groups in north-eastern Brazil, of which 28 had already been recognized by the public indigenist agency (Oliveira, 1999). There was, therefore, an apparent paradox, which some authors denominated as ethnogenesis: the recent emergence of people considered originary.

Similar cases are observed in other Latin American countries. In the case of Bolivia, where the majority of the population is indigenous, metallurgical workers and miners who have traditionally participated in classicist syndicates, from the 1980s, started recognizing themselves as indigenous and taking part in aymara and quechua organizations. The strategy of “(re)construction of indigenous identity” by former workers still seems to be a matter of internal divisions within some syndical organizations, but there is a political and cultural interest in strengthening these ethnic identities (Van Cott, 2005). The triumph of Evo Morales was a decisive step in that direction. It is in the new Constitution of Bolivia that the juridical figure of the Plurinational State is instituted, which recognizes the communal property of indigenous originary territories as a collective right, including the exclusive use of renewable natural resources (Constitution of 2007, Article 392).

These actions of reconstruction of ethnic communities extend to black communities. In the case of Peru, where afro-peruvians represent 10% of the population, the Constitution recognizes the ethnic and cultural plurality of the Nation, although specific public policies have not been implemented. However, in recent decades, communities and organizations have been encouraging “cultural manifestations originary from Africa” and constituting organizations that fight for the conquest of special rights, such as those possessed by indigenous peoples (Ballón, 2002). In this sense, they demand that the State implement the Supreme Decree of Historical Forgiveness to the Afro-peruvian People, allocating budgets to the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (NISI)

for the implementation of census and indicators on the afro-peruvian population and for the incorporation of an intercultural focus into the educational curricula.

Also in Argentina, a country of strong European immigration, the afro-argentinian category is fairly recent and obeys to a phenomenon of cultural and historical reconstruction. During the colonial period the entry of slaves in Spanish America was forbidden by the court, but they were illegally introduced on a massive scale. In the second half of the eighteenth century, black population represented approximately 30% of total population in the current area of Argentina and, in Buenos Aires, approximately 40% of families owned slaves devoted to household chores (Schavelzon, 1999) and there were even slave markets in neighbourhoods of central Buenos Aires. Meanwhile, since the late nineteenth century, with the great influx of European migrants and miscegenation, the Africa that existed in Buenos Aires had become invisible (Reid, 1989). So it is surprising that a century later, in the last decades of the twentieth century, communities that assume themselves as descendants of the first blacks (Schávelzon, 1999) begin to emerge from the interior of the country.

In Columbia, the neo-communitarian movements that claim an afro-colombian identity emerged in the context of Law 70, of 1993, or “Ley de Negritudes”. This law viewed “black communities” as a “group of people in a particular territory able to prove an afro-colombian ancestry, of several generations, living in the same territory”. Therefore, just as the law instituted the category of quilombo remnants in Brazil, it also formed a “new ethno-territorial identity” recognized by the State (Barbary, et. al., 2003). Meanwhile, in the Colombian case, the material proof to certify whether or not the rural communities were descendants of enslaved African peoples between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries was instituted as a juridical fact. This model of institutionalization of ethnic communities was later consolidated with the Colombian Constitution of 1991, which establishes a multiculturalist model that would address the issue of “minorias étnicas y negritudes”, including the creation of specialized state agencies and the allocation of budgetary resources at a national, departmental and municipal scale. The “afro-colombian Pacific” identity would have started to emerge in this political and juridical context in which those groups were guaranteed the right to collective ownership of land and various types of benefits in terms of public policies (Agier, et. al., 2000). Thereby, the afro-colombian identity is articulated, as in Brazil, with the legitimation of territorial rights:

For the rural populations of the Pacific, the entrance to modernity is made through the vindication, often much the “invention” in the anthropological sense, of ancestry and ethnic particularism. The territory is the foundation and basis of mobilization in a double sense: on the one hand, it legitimates and conditions the access to these newly acquired rights after centuries of “invisibility”, and, on the other, it favours the construction of a new collective actor on a national level—the black communities (Hoffmann, 2000 apud Barbary, et. al., 2003:92; our translation).

In Brazil, the category *comunidades remanescentes do quilombos* (communities remnant from *quilombos*) also emerges from the law, the 1988 Constitution, which in Article 68 contemplated that: “Aos remanescentes das comunidades dos quilombos que estejam ocupando suas terras é reconhecida a propriedade definitiva, devendo o Estado emitir-lhes os títulos respectivos”.¹ This expression “remainders of the quilombo”, taken in a strict sense, as an archaeological remnant of communities of escaped ex-slaves, would indeed be applicable only to a few groups, especially in the Amazonian region (O’Dwyer, 2002), but as the standard did not define precisely the scope of this category, a breach was opened for a political dispute over the “re-semanticization” of the term “quilombo” (Arruti, 2005). From its original historical meaning as a place of escape, the quilombo came to be re-signified as “reminiscent of quilombo” indicating the ancestry of black communities in relation to their past of slavery, and soon, as “maroon communities”, with a right to collective ownership of the land in which they lived and worked.

Article 68 of the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 opened the possibility of obtaining titularity of the land to black rural communities, although the constitutional interpretation is still a matter of dispute and of legal and political debates. But the maroon issue was not restricted to land property dimension. From the first government of President Lula was launched the *Brasil Quilombola* programme, involving 17 ministries and five special secretariats, which along with the National Policy for Sustainable Development of Traditional Peoples and Communities, defined a orientation of specific public policies, in the areas of education, housing, health and infrastructure for the maroon rural communities. Therefore, this process of identity

¹ The remainders of the quilombo communities who are occupying their lands are recognized the property outright, and the State must issue them their titles (our translation).

reconstruction assumed unprecedented dimensions, since from the proclamation of the Republic no government had allocated so many economic and institutional resources for that purpose. According to data from the *Secretaria Especial de Promoção de Políticas para a Igualdade Racial do Governo Federal* – SEPPIR – (Special Secretariat of Promotion of Policies for Racial Equality of the Federal Government), there are approximately 3250 acknowledged maroon communities, with about 2,5 million people, but this universe has been expanding.

Thereby, this policy reintroduces the theme of ethnicity and community, which refer to deep Brazil and its colonial past, but also posing new questions on the political and cultural level. One of these is that to access these policies it was necessary to reconstruct ethnic markers that operated as witnesses of that belonging. So that in these commentary spaces signs of ethnicity, such as afro-brazilian religious practices, dances, memories and objects began to circulate, and with these, modern agents – anthropologists, NGOs, university researchers, media, travel agents, cultural agents, among others – who participate in these reconstructions of tradition and sui generis situations of intercultural acquaintanceship. This process of reconstruction of black identity extends throughout the country, although this is not very visible, in part due to the dispersed character of rural communities. The concept of *neocommunities* (Lifschitz, 2012) attempts to account for these processes of reconstruction of traditional communities in contemporaneity, considering new dynamics of interaction between residents and external agents.

NEW COMMUNITARY DINAMICS

We developed the concept of *neocommunities* in the context of research conducted in communities in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro (Lifschitz, 2012). We noticed that the communities we researched were being frequented by agents from NGOs, the media, cultural institutions, ethnic tourism, technicians from the Prefecture and other researchers, a situation that made us encounter the fact that we were very distant from the classic methodological parameters of community studies which drew attention the isolation of rural communities. The incorporation of these new realities of communitary life, the recognition of those new actors, implied the redefinition of what hitherto classical sociology considered the main attribute of community life: a dense internal communication and superficial and transient external contacts.

In fact, this methodological imperative was not very difficult to achieve in 1940s and 1950s Latin America, as rural areas were still not very articulated to major urban and industrial centres. However, by the end of this period, means of transportation and communication systems had begun to break the former isolation, in such a way that the issue of the erasure of distances between society and community had become an unavoidable issue. Therefore, the cut between *community* and *society*, theoretically conceived by Tönnies in the nineteenth century, no longer seemed to correspond to a principle of reality. It was no longer possible to establish the difference between what was “internal” to the community and what was “out” of its limits. If the communitary remained, Boissevain (1975) argued, it was as a construct elaborated by the researcher which referred to sources and problems exterior to the community. This diagnosis, which latin-american and european authors agreed with, seemed to close the paradigm opened by Tönnies. The rural community would seem to have been taken by the streams of empiria.

However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, the theme reappears, primarily in approaches associated to the reformulation of the concept of community in accordance with social and technological changes. Among these redefinitions, some authors proposed that the communitary should be separated from the territorial. They considered that the problem of community studies lay in the fact that they were tied to a definition of community grounded in territorial criteria and face-to-face interaction, both elements in strong decline (Wellman, 2001). They wanted to highlight that, in contemporary life, residential mobility, spatially dispersed social relations and the existence of free distance communication networks such as the Internet constituted new social configurations that had little to do with the idea of the community as a territory in which face-to-face contacts happened.

However, they noted that the idea of community continued to make the most sense in terms of the new “virtual networks” that were expanding progressively. In this sense, they suggested the displacing of the concept of community from the territorial and local sphere to the space of social networks and virtual communities (Wellman, 2001). The “community question” should, therefore, be redefined more in spatial terms than in territorial ones (Laumann, 1973), focusing on the analysis of virtual communities (Zamir, Volker e Flap, 2001).

Meanwhile, in anthropology, the concept of rural community was also subject to redefinition. Barth's approach on ethnic communities, which has become an important reference in the debate about ethnicity policies, stems from the consideration that ethnic communities are not defined by objective factors, such as territoriality or ties of consanguinity. In one of his most disseminated texts, *Ethnic groups and boundaries* (Barth, 1976), he argues that ethnic groups form their identity on the symbolic plane from inter-relationship with other groups. The ethnic community would then have no objective supports, such as territory, language, customs or kinship. According to Barth, groups mobilize those traits they deem significant and, not being constitutive, these can be enabled or disabled depending on the relational context. In this sense, communities define themselves by the self-attribution of identitary signs from "contrasts" with other groups. In his perspective, ethnic identity depends more on the nature and scope of relations between groups than on cultural differences intrinsic to territory. The issue for Barth is not, therefore, to define identities in terms of communities of place or of consanguinity, but to identify the relational contexts in which these emerge.

However, the *neo* prefix, of *neocommunities*, does not allude to the "virtual communities" which we mentioned, nor is it a version of these "symbolic communities". The *neocommunities* we intend to make visible in this book are not virtual realities. They are territories, where questions like territoriality, ancestry, kinship, material culture and face-to-face proximity are actualized, but in relational contexts which reconfigure the relationship between interior and exterior in communities that have been isolated for many decades.

In studies of rural communities in Latin America (Lifschitz, 2012), external agents were associated with social change and modernity. They were considered civilizing agents that ruptured the isolation of communities and were, therefore, the carriers of the erasure of boundaries between the community and society. They were the outsiders, which represented modernity. However, in current *neocommunities*, this relationship changes qualitatively. External and modern agents act precisely in the reconstruction of identities and local traditions according to these indigenous and maroon reconstructions. So the exterior continues to represent change, but now in reverse, since these modern agents act retroactively with the expectation of updating archaic signs, reinstalling a "cut" between the community and society.

This theme is not new. Since the 1970s, Canclini had been observing that instead of diluting the culture of traditional communities, modernity reinforced them (Canclini,

1977; 1982). His research took as its focus the massification of the production of cultural goods and the interpenetration between popular culture, mass culture and the media. He visualized popular culture as a new category of commodities, inserted into the logic of the capitalist system and geared for tourists eager to consume ornaments, ceremonies, symbols and rituals. What was unique in this dynamic, according to the author, was that this interpenetration happened within a market logic which obeyed to the following principle: “to recognize popular creations, but not the people and communities that created them”.

In recent work he has developed the concept of cultural hybridization (Canclini, 2003), in reference to new syncretisms and intercultural mixtures which had been happening in Latin America. He drew attention to the fact that transnational companies held control over the processes of production and circulation of these new cultural repertoires which led to an increasing deterritorialization of culture. Under this frame work, he characterized that moment in popular culture as a phenomenon of “hybridization” and “deterritorialization” of cultural production. Suggesting, in that direction, that the best space to study popular cultures were border areas and major cities. Undoubtedly, these phenomena analysed by Canclini constituted, and continue to constitute, a trend of popular culture in Latin America. However, the situation we categorize as *neocommunities* constitutes one other moment of local cultures. Modern agents are not as interested in the products of popular culture as much as what is produced within the community itself. They are more interested in the territory than in craftwork. In the same way, if the commodification of popular culture was the trend, now the case seems to be the “de-commodification”. More than a generic popular art, this attention is placed on the singularity of each community; in the difference that each community prints to its cultural expressions.

MODERN AGENTS AND ARCHAIC RURAL KNOWLEDGES

The search for the authentic was present in the origin of folklore studies. With the expectation of making folklore a science, those who dominated the field were very rigorous about methodological requirements, primarily on the need for distance and non-interference in the content of expressions of popular culture which they intended to register and classify (Ortiz, 1985). A Carta do Folclore Brasileiro (The Charter of

Brazilian Folklore), approved at the first Congress of Folklore held in 1951, states the following:

Constituem o fato folclórico as maneiras de pensar, sentir e agir de um povo, preservadas pela tradição popular e pela imitação e que não sejam diretamente influenciadas pelos circuitos eruditos e instituições que se dedicam ou à renovação e conservação do patrimônio científico e artístico humano ou à fixação de uma orientação religiosa e filosófica” (apud Vilhena, 1997:140)²

The folklorist should be more of a compiler of culture, exhaustive and systematic, than its interpreter. A passive role towards the expressions of popular culture should be assumed, and the task of the folklorist should be discovering, not interfering. Therefore, from the parameter of folklore studies, *neocommunities* represent a methodological “diversion”. However, contemporary anthropology would be more condescending. As anthropologist Roy Wagner (2010) says, *culture is a continuous process of re-creation*. But regardless of the trial of such practices, what is observed since approximately the 1990s is that traditional communities are being a stage of projects and actions of NGOs, tourism agents, local prefectures, cultural and heritage agencies, among others, that have been acting on the reconstruction of territories, knowledge and practices. They are not limited to rating, as folklorists formerly were. They develop cultural repertoires. These repertoires encompass varied elements, from the recreation of “slave gastronomy” and indigenous languages, to the recreation of afro-brazilian rituals. As a kind of bricolage, between local memories and modern devices, *neocommunities* are spaces of coproduction of communitary cultural heritage and ethnic heritage, in which the media dimension is not missing. These repertoires are very diverse, but have in common the feature of using modern means in service of tradition. Examples of this type have been spreading in rural communities across the country, constituting

² The ways of thinking, feeling and acting of a people, preserved by popular tradition and by imitation, which aren't directly influenced by scholarly circuits and institutions engaged in either the renovation and conservation of scientific and artistic human heritage or the establishment of a religious and philosophical orientation, constitute the folkloric fact. (apud Vilhena, 1997: 140)

contemporary phenomena of cultural reconstruction that involve, on the one hand, communities with traditions and knowledge and, on the other, modern agents that aim to recreate them. In this way, *neocommunities* renew the theme of tradition-modernity. This debate is centuries old, and we are far from intending to approach it in its economic and historical dimension. Regarding the latter, we will restrict our comment to some considerations on the current debate. The concept of “invention of traditions”, coined by historian Eric Hobsbawm, points out the paradox that some European traditions, considered ancestral, had actually been “invented” in modernity. Eric Hobsbawm understood by “invented tradition”:

[...] A set of practices, normally regulated by tacit or openly accepted rules, of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour through repetition, which implies, automatically, a continuity with relation to the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger, op cit.:. 9; our translation).

Despite the assigned ancestrality, these were traditions recreated in relatively recent historical moments marked by a rapid transformation of society. The purpose of the “invention of traditions” was to provoke a sense of historical continuity to ensure political legitimacy of current institutions and patterns. This would happen, for example, in Europe before WWII, with the emergence of a true mass production of ceremonies, symbols and folkloric expressions; and, in the nineteenth century, within colonies, where there were such phenomena as the “english inventions of african traditions for africans” (Ranger, 2000). Although many of these African traditions were pre-existent to colonization, they were reified or manipulated in function of colonial rule.

The idea of *neocommunities* approaches the “innovation of traditions” in diverse aspects. Firstly, because it deals with the activation of past traditions in modern contexts, a perspective which opened an interesting field of research about the paradoxes involved in the modernity/tradition relation. Secondly, it drew attention to the creation of traditions as a political strategy of legitimation and control. However, they have not progressed a lot in understanding the discourses and mechanisms which

mobilized themselves in order to reconstruct tradition and virtually disregarded the disputes about the very idea of tradition.

In the research we conducted in the Serrinha community in Rio de Janeiro (Lifschitz, 2000), we observed that the authenticity of certain cultural practices was a matter of dispute. Considering how authentic *jongo* was the one danced in *terreiros*, using three drums, rattle and *reco-reco*, many residents and people of this culture questioned the innovations that were introduced in the 1960s by Mestre Darcy and later by his disciples, who introduced new instruments, such as guitar and *cavaquinho*, and new dance steps.

Other differences pertain to the possibility of multiple trajectories in the construction of one same tradition. In some *neocommunities*, the interaction between traditional agents and modern agents refers to situations characteristic of the *society of spectacle* (Debord, 1997). They seemed to have been reconstructed as scenarios for an audience avid for the spectacle of ethnic difference and anthropological tourism, but not everything happened that way. In the maroon community of Machadinho (North of the State of Rio de Janeiro), a local NGO developed actions to reactivate the *jongo*, which had practically disappeared in that locality. *Jongo* came from the African region of Congo-Angola with the black population of bantu origin, brought as slaves to work on sugar and coffee plantations in the region of Vale do Rio Paraíba, which spans to the states of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo. *Jongo* was sung by a poet-sorcerer who improvised short phrases – *pontos de jongo*- with a guttural sound, mixing Portuguese with words of bantu origin, creating an encrypted and enigmatic language intended for worship, amusement, posing a challenge or spell, and which sometimes presented dramatic situations, such as when the *ponto* should be *desatado* (untied) by black elders at the risk of the person being *amarrada* (tied), which could imply losing one's voice, getting lost in the woods and even the possibility of being murdered. The masters allowed their slaves to dance the *jongo* on the days of catholic saints, but seemed unaware, or simply denied, that the dance conceals a religious intentionality condensed in the *pontos de jongo* and controlled by the elders, who, besides, were the only ones to participate in the wheel. Thus, the slaves communicated through messages whose meaning was not understood by the white.

Especially in the presentations of *jongo* to which we attended in Machadinho, we understood that the elders maintained a link with this tradition. This was visible in the expression of their faces, which remained contained, focused, and in their movements,

which seemed to invoke absent presences. The black elders were the aura of the *jongo*. However, looking at the recent *jongo* groups of teenagers, another subjective record was noticeable. The steps were loose, joyful, accompanied by eloquent and shy smiles. It was clear that they were performing for an audience. Therefore, we noticed in the same *jongo* two subjectivities crossed by a generational cut.

Another difference in relation to the “invention of traditions”, refers to the means of production of tradition. The analyses of this english historiographical current have as their historical context the nineteenth century and the post-war situation, but, in most of the presented cases, inventions are a product of traditional technologies. This refers to the Scottish invention of the plaid wool kilt produced by means of traditional techniques; to the invention of the ancient music of Wales by circles of amateur musicians; to heraldry and symbols, by means of rustic equipment. That is, modernity is here considered in chronological terms, since the means to rebuild tradition are also traditional. In the case of *neocommunities*, these are processes in which the means of production of tradition are modern.

The theme of the uses of modernity by tradition is present in Sahlins (1997; 2004), in the approach he called “indigenization of modernity”. The author points out that theories of global culture would have led to believe that indigenous and traditional communities had collapsed, as if indeed there had been a “universal acculturation”. This picture was denied by the author, who notes a proliferation of traditional communities that actively and inventively interact with modernity without abandoning their cultures. These are traditional communities which integrated aspects of modernity in their traditional cosmologies, or communities in which the contact with modern economy had provoked the intensification of their traditional cultures, as in the case of peoples of New Guinea after decolonization. He observes that, for these peoples, the entrance of money and industrialized goods has provoked the resumption of traditional ceremonies, rather than the disarticulation of communities.

Based on ethnographic studies, the author shows that there were on-going processes of indigenization of modernity, in which traditional communities reverted modern objects and practices to their own cultural uses. He concluded that modernity was not always capable of printing its own rationality over tradition, and, furthermore, that traditional communities, by integrating into the market economy could, paradoxically, be reinforcing their own reinforced traditions. As Sahlins (1997: 64) says, we should not underestimate the power that indigenous peoples have to culturally integrate the

irresistible forces of the World System³. “Indigenization” was therefore perceived as an alternative to capitalist “modernization”. On the other hand, the situation is somewhat different in *neocommunities*, because the modern behaves like the “horse” of *candomblé*: it “descends” to accomplish what is proposed. Traditions are produced, using “modern” techniques and devices, such as set design, dance techniques, videos, anthropological reports, cultural management, shows, and others. It is then not about the resistance of tradition to modernity, but the realization of tradition through modernity. And also it is not about tradition subsisting despite modernity but the realization of tradition through modernity. What are the implications of the use of modern techniques for the production of traditions in the rural environment?

Firstly we must consider that it is not about a mere change of technical basis. It is about the use of technique in the context of a modern episteme (Habermas, 1968), which in principle implies another paradigm with respect to tradition. In structural terms, we can characterize modern episteme by three aspects: specialized knowledge, application of abstract systems of action and the instrumental use of technique (Habermas, 2000; Giddens, 2001). Modern knowledge is regulated by “abstract systems of knowledge” and based on impersonal and universalizing principles that can be apprehended and applied by any individual who specializes in a field of knowledge. However, the effectiveness of modern knowledges rests on these abstract systems. The range of science is independent of the individuals who apply these principles. What legitimates the practice of specialists is not the fact that there are individuals who carry non-transferable knowledges, but the belief in these abstract systems of universal reach, subjected to correction and improvement (Giddens, 2001). Therefore, modern knowledge is not contextualized, that is, it can be acquired and applied regardless of its context.

As to the episteme of traditional knowledge, the contextual domain is decisive. Traditional knowledge, says Giddens, is associated to the figure of guardians of local traditions, who have privileged access to formulaic truths that need not be demonstrated and which are manifested in their interpretations and practices. Healers, magical or religious agents, are the carriers of such non-transferable knowledge, yet consubstantial to the entire community because they constitute the emotional link with their past and

³ our translation.

their cultural identity. Thus, tradition operates as a frontier between the familiar and the “foreign”, so that the threats to the integrity of the tradition are frequently experienced as threats to the community itself (Giddens, op cit: 102). Here we should also include the domain of traditional “technical knowledge”, to which Lévi-Strauss (1960) referred as a domain of knowledge which is distinguished from modern technical knowledge. According to Lévi-Strauss, the logic of this traditional knowledge would consist in building objects from arrangements of parts and heteroclite tools, similarly to bricolage. This unique mode of technical agency, using “residues from constructions and destructions” and relying on randomly available tools, would produce contingent results, yet as legitimate as the products of modern technique, based on “projects”. While this modern technique defines its episteme in terms of “project”, practical knowledge are founded on instrumentality.

To sum, modern episteme is “disembodying”, while traditional episteme is associated with local contexts. In the former, beliefs around efficacy and the power of specialized scientific knowledge are mobilized; in the latter, practical knowledge are at stake, shamans and guardians of memory and cultural identities. However, either in Giddens as in Lévi-Strauss, these oppositions are not hierarchical, that is, modern episteme is not considered as superior to traditional episteme, but they correspond to different universes of social action: modern knowledge (of which Giddens speaks about), pertains to post-traditional societies and traditional knowledge (Lévi-Strauss) refers to primitive societies. Thereby, *neocommunities* would be areas in which historically and spatially distanced techniques and epistemes converge. Thus, we formulate an operational definition of *neocommunities*:

Neocommunities are cultural processes in which modern agents operate on the organizational, material and symbolic forms of traditional communities in order to rebuild territories, practices and knowledges from modern techniques and epistemes.

Therefore we emphasize the “modern” character of the means of production of tradition, as well as the interaction between agents and practices, modern and traditional, in the same social space, a situation which characterizes the current situation of traditional communities. However, commenting on one of the first articles I wrote on the subject,

Siqueira (2009), in the context of an anthropological report of a maroon community, observed the following:

(...) The nature of self-explanatory conformity of this notion of *neocommunity* would be insufficient for a proper understanding of the arrangements that are constituted in terms of social action. People from outside and from within the community tend to assume, concomitantly, activities and positions which, many times, are inverted within the tipology that the term *neocommunities* enunciates. The dicotomic assumption that suggests a distinction of behaviour and interests between modern and traditional agents thus becomes imperceptible in the field of social relations. (Siqueira, 2009; our translation)

In fact, in our analysis we had not contemplated situations in which modern practices could be introduced by traditional agents or even juxtapositions of traditional and modern practices in a single agent. However, we consider that the particularity of this perspective is not so much to elucidate *who* is the bearer of modernity or of tradition. The agents can be “swapped”, but our interest focuses on the effects, in giving visibility to new types of tensions and conflicts derived from the juxtaposition of different universes of social action in the same communitary space. Modern agents (among which we obviously were included), belonged to an ethnic, social and cultural universe different from the residents of these black rural communities.

Therefore, more than identifying relationships of symmetry between agents and practices, we were interested in understanding the effects of this encounter of epistemes. We also consider that *neocommunities* should not be interpreted as a mere process of commodification of tradition, of which only modern agents benefit. We note that modern agents establish relations of mutual dependence with traditional agents. On the one hand, external institutions need communitary tradition in order to make their projects viable and to generate new resources associated linked to material and immaterial heritage. On the other, the community needs external institutions to project its value, both symbolically and materially. Therefore, it does not necessarily indicate a positive or negative cultural dynamic from the standpoint of the configuration of interests. But this should not prevent the noticing of the emergence of conflicts and tensions, especially when it refers to the formulation of cultural policies. If we look only at the maroon communities of Rio de Janeiro, we can note that the situation of the

Marambaia community at the state's seashore, which involves the dispute of territories with the War Navy, has few contact points with the situation of Machadinha, in which other actors, such as the Institute of National Historic Heritage and the local Prefecture. In reality, each participated, in its own way, in the reconstruction of an ethnic community.

Some were involved in the reconstruction of *jongo*, others in slave gastronomy, others tried to produce documentary images and narratives about the tradition of the community, and so, processes of reconstruction of territories and practices were happening in these rural communities, coming from a strong interaction between residents and modern agents. In such a way, *neocommunities*, as a model of ethnicity policy and of local development, constitute a singular case considering the global context. This institutional pattern, by admitting the right to land to maroon communities, establishes a political action of the State which can be considered inaugural: for the first time since the proclamation of the Republic a policy is applied on rural black populations, which has consequences on the domain of land property. This "black agrarian reform", as certain political groups have termed it, began to be increasingly pushed for in legal terms and there are juridical actions of political parties and farmers to neutralize its reach. According to an official document from the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform there currently exist in the country 1,826 certified communities and 121 titles issued, regularizing 998, 356.6694 hectares in benefit of 109 territories, 190 communities and 11, 946 maroon families. The document notes that these titled territories comprise 0.12% of national territory and adds the following comment: It is estimated that the titling of all maroons in the country will not reach 1%, being that all other agricultural establishments account for about 40%. Despite their small size, it is these territories which will ensure the physical reproduction of maroon families, as well as their sustainability. We do not identify further information about the range of such information on titling processes, but the document is explicit by indicating that: the titling of all maroons of Brazil will not reach 1%. May that be the limit of this policy of ethnicity in rural communities?

In principle, all public policy imposes limits in terms of allocation of resources, deadlines and timelines for execution. However, these limits can be altered through the action of social movements and relations of political force, but in administrative terms the document notes that plateau. It should then be asked to what extent this policy of ethnicity allows joining forces and advancing in the plane of land rights.

FINAL REMARKS

During the decades of 1950 and 1960, the countryside-city relationship is practically inverted in Latin America, and the region becomes predominantly industrial and urban. In this cycle of modernization, traditional communities practically become invisible as a field of research and public action, but since the decade of 1990 there is a “return” of traditional rural communities, both in terms of public policies and research interests.

In the majority of the countries of the region, the politics of recognition of ethnic groups happened after a process of devastation, in which the abandon of ethnic marks was considered as the most visible sign of acculturation and eminent extinction of groups. At present, these marks of identity have been reappearing as signs of a contrary direction, witnessing the persistence and emergence of indigenous peoples and afrodescendants. This process has received several denominations and involves very diverse situations, which point towards the revitalization of the traditional criteria of “ethnic marks” in the search for the (re)construction of those identities.

In some countries of the region, those communitary ethnic identities began to be mobilized from constitutional regulations implemented by the State, as in the case of “maroon” identity in Brazil and “black communities” in Colombia.

From the first government of president Lula various public programs have been released which place this process of identity reconstruction on a whole new level, since, from the proclamation of the Republic, no government had ever destined so many economic and institutional resources towards that end. Beyond the land property issue, maroon policy was harnessed to public policies in the areas of health, education, vocational training and agricultural credit, appreciation and diffusion of afro-Brazilian cultural manifestations and the preservation of tangible and intangible heritage.

In this article we draw attention towards those new links between ethnic identities, the State and cultural mediators and towards distinct processes of identity (re)construction. In some communities there was a strong record of the social memory of slavery and of territorial occupation that went back to several generations. However, others did not recognize themselves as maroons. In this context, different mediators turned towards the reconstruction of maroon identity in an attempt to bring those communities closer to practices and traditions of the afro-Brazilian cultural universe. This originated processes of ethnic and territorial reconstruction that, in my view, have not been evaluated in all their complexity.

The concept of *neocommunities* attempts to account for these processes of reconstruction of traditional communities in contemporaneity, considering some aspects which became present in field research. First, to identify this new moment of traditional communities, which were characterized by being subjected to dense internal communication and superficial and transitory external contact. We try to conceptually incorporate the perception that communities were being frequented by a diversity of modern agents, such as NGOs, university researchers, media, travel agents, cultural agents, among others.

Secondly, the concept of *neocommunities* tried to capture a change in the relation between external agents and community. The methodologies of folklore studies have always demanded that the researcher would not interfere in the cultural practices that he intended to register and classify. *Neocommunities* represent a fairly singular situation in respect to these methodological procedures, because they are precisely characterized by the fact that their external agents actively participate in the reconstruction of spaces and cultural practices, intervening in the material and symbolic infrastructure of communities with the expectation of revitalizing original community.

Thirdly, these are processes of reconstruction of tradition in which modern techniques were being used, such as scenography, dance techniques, videos, reports, planning and cultural production. In effect, a whole modern *episteme* was being mobilized, which went far beyond a mere technical basis, and from that encounter between different universes of values and interests we observed that singular conflicts and tensions emerged, as we saw in the case of *jongo* in which there was an implicit tension between the affective and subjective links of cultural transmission and the technical devices. Therefore, we consider that, in the global context, the *neocommunities* of Latin America constitute a singular model of ethnicity and recognition policy, based in rural communities, in state institutionalization, and in the action of modern political mediators.

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